

Truth and History in the Ancient World

**Hau, Lisa; Ruffell, Ian;
Lisa Irene Hau**

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TRUTH AND HISTORY IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

PLURALISING THE PAST



ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN ANCIENT HISTORY

EDITED BY IAN RUFFELL
AND LISA HAU



Truth and History in the Ancient World

Pluralising the Past

This collection of essays investigates histories in the ancient world and the extent to which the producers and consumers of those histories believed them to be true. Ancient Greek historiographers repeatedly stressed the importance of truth to history; yet they also purported to believe in myth, distorted facts for nationalistic or moralising purposes, and omitted events that modern audiences might consider crucial to a truthful account of the past.

Truth and History in the Ancient World explores a pluralistic concept of truth—one in which different versions of the same historical event can all be true—or different kinds of truths and modes of belief that are contingent on culture.

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Truth and History in the Ancient World

Pluralising the Past

**Edited by Ian Ruffell and
Lisa Irene Hau**

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
NEW YORK AND LONDON

First published 2017
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

and by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Ruffell, Ian, editor of compilation. | Hau, Lisa Irene, editor of compilation.

Title: Truth and history in the ancient world : pluralising the past / edited by Ian Ruffell and Lisa Irene Hau.

Description: Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY : Routledge, 2016. |
Series: Routledge studies in ancient history | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016022533 | ISBN 9781138839403 (hardback : alkaline paper) | ISBN 9781315733463 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Greece—History—To 146 B.C.—Historiography. | History, Ancient—Historiography. | Historians—Greece—History—To 1500. | Historiography—Greece—History—To 1500. | Truth—Social aspects—Greece—History—To 1500. | Truth—Political aspects—Greece—History—To 1500. | Cultural pluralism—Greece—History—To 1500. | Greece—Intellectual life—To 146 B.C.

Classification: LCC DF211 .T748 2016 | DDC 938.0072—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016022533>

ISBN: 978-1-138-83940-3 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-315-73346-3 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman

by Swales & Willis, Exeter, Devon, UK

Contents

Preface

Abbreviations

List of Contributors

1 Introduction

IAN RUFFELL AND LISA IRENE HAU

2 The Challenging Abundance of the Past: Pluralising and Reducing in Pindar's Victory Songs

JAN R. STENGER

3 Tragedy and Fictionality

IAN RUFFELL

4 Seventeen Types of Ambiguity in Euripides' *Helen*

MATTHEW WRIGHT

5 Multiple Ways to Access the Past: The Myth of Oedipus, Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and Herodotus' *Histories*

CATHERINE DARBO-PESCHANSKI

6 Fictional Truth and Factual Truth in Herodotus

ANTHONY ELLIS

7 *Se non è vero*: On the Use of Untrue Stories in Herodotus

KATHARINA WESSELMANN

8 Intertextuality and Plural Truths in Xenophon's Historical Narrative

EMILY BARAGWANATH

9 Ctesias of Cnidus: Poet, Novelist or Historian?

ALEXANDER MEEUS

10 The Aesthetics of Truth: Narrative and Historical Understanding in Polybius' *Histories*

NICOLAS WIATER

11 Truth and Moralising: The Twin Aims of the Hellenistic Historiographers

LISA IRENE HAU

12 Alexander and the Amazonian Queen: Truth and Fiction

JOSEPH ROISMAN

13 Lucian on Truth and Lies in Ancient Historiography: The Theory
and its Limits

MELINA TAMIOLAKI

Index

Preface

This volume is based around papers presented at the Celtic Conference in Classics held at Bordeaux in July 2012. We would like to thank the founder and chair of this remarkable institution, Anton Powell, for his support of the panel and at an early stage in the subsequent project, and the conference organisers in Bordeaux for laying on a truly splendid event. We would also like to thank all those who participated in the extremely fruitful discussions at Bordeaux, both in and outside the formal panel.

We would also like to mention those who presented papers at the event but who were unable to contribute to this volume—Matthew Fox, Elizabeth Irwin and John Oksanish. Their invaluable contributions to the discussion can be felt in the papers presented here. We are delighted also to be able to present the contribution of Matthew Wright, who was unable to make it to the conference, and the additional paper of our Glasgow colleague Jan Stenger on lyric poetry.

The volume was improved by the helpful and stimulating comments of the two anonymous readers. We owe a particular debt to our colleague Christopher Burden-Stevens for helping us out by delivering a translation of a complex paper at very short notice. Last, but by no means least, we would like to thank everyone at Routledge for their support and flexibility, in particular Lizzi Thomasson.

Abbreviations

Abbreviations follow those of *L'Année Philologique*, in the case of journals, and LSJ, in the case of Greek authors (except *Hcl*d, rather than *Heracl.* for Euripides' *Heraclidae*; *Thesm.* for Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*).

Note in addition the following:

<i>BNJ</i>	<i>Brill's New Jacoby</i> , ed. I. Worthington. Leiden: Brill, 2007–. http://www.brill.nl/publications/online-resources/jacoby-online
<i>D–K</i>	<i>Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker</i> , sixth edition, ed. H. Diels and W. Kranz, three volumes. Berlin: Weidmann, 1952.
<i>DNP</i>	<i>Der Neue Pauly: Enzyklopädie der Antike</i> , ed. H. Cancik and H. Schneider. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1996–2003.
<i>FGrH</i>	<i>Die Fragmente der Griechischen Historiker</i> , ed. F. Jacoby. Berlin: Weidmann, 1923–.
<i>LSJ</i>	H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, <i>A Greek–English Lexicon</i> , ninth edition, revised by H. Stuart Jones and R. McKenzie. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940.
<i>PMG</i>	<i>Poetae Melici Graeci</i> , ed. D. L. Page. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962.
<i>RE</i>	<i>Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i> , ed. G. Wissowa, W. Kroll and K. Witte. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1894–1980.
<i>TrGF</i>	<i>Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta</i> , ed. B. Snell, S. Radt and R. Kannicht. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971–2004.

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1 Introduction

Ian Ruffell and Lisa Irene Hau

The relationship of truth to the writing of history may seem at first sight to be a trivial one, but it is a problem that has preoccupied historians ever since its emergence as a self-conscious practice. Both in theory and in practice historians not only debated whether it was right or appropriate to concentrate (exclusively) on the truth, but also employed a wide variety of different types of truths in their work. This complex relationship to truth was only one part of a broader engagement with the past in ancient culture, an engagement, indeed, out of which history itself emerged and a context against which it continued to operate. The function of truth in history was itself entirely open for discussion. The very multiplicity of truths in ancient engagement with history is the topic of this book.

The essays collected here investigate the extent to which the producers and consumers of histories in the ancient world believed in those stories or the extent to which they were committed to their truth. The Greek historiographers repeatedly stress the importance of truth to history, but, as is well known, they also purport to believe in myth, distort facts for nationalistic or moralising reasons, and omit events that modern audiences might consider crucial to a truthful account of the past. This has led some scholars to collapse historiography into rhetoric. Outside historiography, Greek tragedy is a form of poetic production that notably creates versions of a shared past that are often sharply at variance with one another. As such, tragedy has been co-opted both as a repository of cultural memory and as a paradigm for storytelling and fictionality. The problematic status of Greek myth, moreover, has often been elided in relation to historiography, tragedy and other contexts for telling stories about the past. This book explores the hypothesis of a pluralistic concept of truth, one where different versions of the same historical event can all be true, or where there are different kinds of truths, or modes of belief that are culturally contingent.

The ancient world recognised a broader range of approaches to truth in relation to discourses about the past than that with which modern academics and audiences might be entirely familiar or comfortable. The fundamental problems in these approaches to the

past in the ancient world do not, however, constitute an anomaly set against the long history of historiography, a false start, as it were, beyond which 'we' have progressed.¹ Rather, they speak to the ongoing problems discussed by historians and philosophers of history, not least in the last quarter of a century, as old certainties have crumbled and debate about the nature of history has if anything intensified. From the perspective on non-historiographic genres, there has also been seen a proliferation of attempts to think through more relaxed notions of truth, belief and knowledge, including in genres that seem to hint at a relationship with the past (such as historical and speculative fiction). As one contemplates these modern debates, the variety of ancient historiography and the background of creative approaches to the past in which it is embedded continue to be instructive.

Uses of the Past, Ancient and Modern

Both ancient and modern debates about truth in history need to be seen against their social and cultural contexts, where there is, likewise, a varied approach to truth and history. Superficially, the modern world looks substantially different, with the professionalisation of the practice of history within academia, yet this, no less than ancient practice has to be seen against the background of social and cultural memory, both in institutional and more informal contexts. Over the last twenty years or so, much has been written about how the past has been remembered, forgotten or memorialised, not least with reference to the Holocaust, or to totalitarianism of one stripe or another, or to conflict resolutions and transitions to democracy, but increasingly the trope of memory has been applied more widely.² The modern practice of history exists not only alongside official practices and social or cultural memory, but also in dialogue or competition with them, at times allied or implicated in institutional and cultural memory, at other times critiquing or contesting it. At the time of writing, we have witnessed a wave of memorialisations in the UK context relating to World War One (outbreak), Two (D-Day; VE Day) and Waterloo, memorialisations in which professional historians have been implicated.³

Historical memory was equally important in the ancient world. In foundational acts of historiography, both Herodotus and Thucydides, famously, complain about popular understanding of the death of Hipparchus and the end of the Pisistratid tyranny at Athens, albeit that they give rather different accounts of what the actual truth of the situation was.⁴ It is quite clear that in this case, at least, such social

memory was encouraged by actions of the early democracy in fostering the story of the tyrannicides and enhancing their public status. Instances could multiply: the truth of the Athenians' ethical foreign policy going back into the mythical past, as articulated in the *epitaphios* (funeral speech),⁵ the dynastic competition at Rome that traced *gentes* (families) back to mythical origins, the contested truth of Rome's early history in the move from Republic to principate,⁶ or the changing truths about recent political history as both Athenian and Roman political systems were reconstituted after crises.⁷

The status and role of such social or institutional memory is complicated by the cultural and indeed historical authority of many different types of discourse that related to the past, and out of which history was to emerge in the fifth century. Chief among these was epic poetry, which retailed versions of the distant, heroic past, but similar smaller-scale claims about the period were offered in other forms of poetry such as lyric, often in contexts of public performance. In the fifth century, the genre of tragedy more than any other raises the issue of the flexibility and multiplicity of myth. Taken together, these genres raise the problematic issue of the status and truth claims of myth, or the nature of those truth claims. Even for a sceptical and rationalising approach such as that of Thucydides, the broad outlines of the mythical past were taken as true.

Even leaving aside the legends of the distant past, historical truth claims about the more recent past were first presented in lyric poetry rather than prose history. This is best seen in elegiac poetry, such as the exhortations of Tyrtaeus or the more recently discovered extended historical elegy of Simonides on the Persian Wars, but truth claims about individuals and cities can be seen in sung poetry such as Pindar's epinicians and dithyrambs.⁸ That tradition of poetry on the (relatively) recent past continued through into the Roman period, not least in historical epic (Ennius' *Annales*, Cicero's *De Consulatu Suo*, Lucan's *Bellum Civile*) but also in other genres (such as Juvenal, *Satires* 4). Outside poetry, truth claims about the past were a feature of many forms of oratory, not least epideictic, including (but by no means limited to) the *epitaphios* (funeral speech), and of philosophy, not least political philosophy (such as Aristotle's *Politics* or Cicero's *De Re Publica* and *De Officiis*). Again, this continued from Greek into Roman literature, where the practice of exemplarity was a feature of both genres.

All of this means that it is doubly difficult to draw a *cordon sanitaire* around the practice of history and the genre of historiography in the ancient world. Not only are authoritative truth claims about the past

not limited to the genre of historiography, but the subjects covered by history were often shared with other genres, with many historical writers including elements of the heroic past, fantastic events or other material that would now seem odd components of historiography. Not only does this pose challenges to historians in establishing (or choosing whether to establish) their particular brand of truth, it also raises the question of how consistently historians make truth claims or in what ways ancient audiences distinguished between the truth claims of different genres. From another perspective, the practices of historians as storytellers and the habits of their readers come close to those of more self-avowedly fictional discourses such as the novel. As it has long been recognised, distinguishing between the different types of belief, knowledge and expectation among such discourses also becomes a pressing concern.⁹

Truth in Ancient Historiography

Most people would agree that historiography is distinguished from fiction by its obligation to attempt to tell the truth about the past. Nevertheless, the relationship between historiography and truth is by no means straightforward. In the texts of the ancient historians one can find statements that extol truth as the quintessential ingredient in historiography, but also expressions that seem hopelessly naive about a historian's ability to find out the truth about past events, and even passages that imply a broader definition of truth than present-day readers may be comfortable with. Moreover, some of the events reported as true by ancient historians are manifestly fictitious. For these reasons, scholarship for the past thirty-odd years has been intermittently concerned with establishing the truthfulness—or lack of it—of the ancient historiographers.

One line of argument, pioneered provocatively by Woodman and still popular, is that the ancient Greeks and Romans considered historiography to be a branch of rhetoric, and that writers of history engaged in *inventio* as freely as orators and playwrights.¹⁰ For this reason, we should not trust anything the ancient historians say. In a similar vein, Wiseman has argued that Thucydides and Polybius, famous for their methodological statements about the importance of truth for historiography, were the exceptions whereas most ancient historians were, in fact, mendacious and often more interested in telling a good story than in reporting factual truth.¹¹ This view is widespread with regard to Hellenistic historiography generally, with the exception of Polybius, and is sometimes extended to the entirety of Greek historiography.¹² Another common approach, championed by

Luce, is to see the 'truthfulness' claimed by Greek historiographers as the opposite not of mendacity or credulity, but of bias.¹³ A more sophisticated approach is that of Moles, who has demonstrated that even Thucydides and, perhaps less surprisingly, Herodotus sometimes depart from the literal truth in order to offer a more 'general' or 'thematic' truth. Moles argues that the tension between an obligation to report the factual truth of particular events and the desire to create a work useful for posterity because of its more general applicability exists in all (good) historiography, modern as well as ancient.¹⁴ At the same time, a large group of scholars maintain that truth was the all-important aim for some or most ancient historiographers.¹⁵

History and Its Discontents

While this discussion has been going on in Classical scholarship, debates have continued within the discipline of history as to the nature of historical truth and the role of the historian. Since the confident assertions of positivist history (embodied in von Ranke's famous disclaimer that he would show simply 'how, essentially, things happened'¹⁶) and the claims (partly spurred by ancient historiographers) that history was a science, the twentieth century saw received notions of historical truth being questioned, whether from self-consciously deterministic approaches with an overarching metanarrative, such as Marxist history, or the rise of social and economic history with the *Annales* school that added to or displaced pre-existing causal explanations. This debate intensified in the post-war period, with the objectivity of historians being increasingly questioned. That is not a debate from which Classical history has been absent. One of the crucial examples adduced by the influential contribution of E. H. Carr (1961) in demonstrating the impossibility of an entirely objective history was George Grote's history of Greece. This, Carr argued, was significantly coloured by the hopes and aspirations of the Victorian middle class of whom Grote was himself a representative and for whom he was writing. For Carr, such shaping of history by the historian affected not only what facts were selected for discussion (to become historical truth), but also the analysis that is made of those facts (a broader set of truths).

The subjectivity and cultural contingency of the historian was, for Carr himself, unavoidable and did not preclude genuine historical insight, even from historians with strong *a priori* views on the forces of history. While no determinist himself, his inclusivity as well as subjectivity drew the ire of conservative critics such as Elton (1967), who maintained a more objective, as well as contingent view of

history, and one based (moreover) on the traditional fields of politics and government. This debate over the nature and extent of historical causation (and its truth) as well as of what particular historical facts should be selected, was of particular importance at the height of the Cold War.

Although Carr's relativism filled conservative critics of the time with horror, the challenge to straightforward notions of historical truth have become, if anything, stronger, with the advent of postmodern perspectives on history. On the one hand, postmodernism brought with it a suspicion of metanarratives¹⁷ that undermined deterministic approaches that had been a central part of the earlier dispute, and on the other the moves towards a subjective and always incomplete history were amplified. It is now a commonplace not just that it is impossible for a historian to be entirely objective, but also that it is impossible to recreate or represent the past exactly, and that all a historian can do is present a made-up picture of past events. If the past only becomes intelligible through the narrativisation and emplotment of events by the historian, such a historian's obligation to tell the truth is complicated to say the least.¹⁸ In the wake of these developments, there have already been some efforts to rehabilitate the credentials of individual ancient historians, notably Herodotus.¹⁹

If postmodern critique and developments within the European left itself substantially undermined Marxist history, political developments with the end of the Cold War seemed to spell the end of determinism, only for it to continue with vigorous teleological force on the right in the 1990s, in such figures as Francis Fukuyama and Samuel P. Huntington.²⁰ To be sure, such interpretations were and are highly contested, but they do clearly indicate the continuing desire to impose a moral and political shape on history as a form of truth. Given such authors' strong relations with the neoconservative movement in the US at the time, the interrelation of history, truth and interpretation with public policy is very evident.

In other ways too, the question of historical truth and its limits have been of political and legal significance outside the classroom. Holocaust denial is illegal in several countries around the world. In the 1990s in the UK, it was the topic of a libel trial where the Holocaust denier David Irving sued US academic Deborah Lipstadt. Leading historians such as Richard J. Evans were called for the defence and have reflected subsequently on the proceedings.²¹

The same period saw historians experimenting with alternative ways of imagining the past and accessing a kind of historical truth,

including the use of counterfactual history. Such practice brings history close to the methods of a branch of speculative fiction ('alternative history'). Practitioners would claim to be differing substantially in terms of goals: exploring alternative histories in order to emphasise either the contingency of history or the significance of specific events or individuals. On a smaller scale, such counterfactuals are in practice often implicitly or explicitly used by historians to identify events or actions of particular significance or importance, but sustained use of counterfactual history has met with vigorous criticism, not least on political grounds: that counterfactual history is strongly associated with a contingent view of history that overstates individual contributions (the 'great man' approach to history). From its earliest appearances in the 1930s to more recent exponents such as Niall Ferguson (1997), there has often been a strongly conservative or reactionary aspect to such projects.²² In a slightly different vein, and with an even further weakened threshold between history and fiction, some twenty-first-century historians have experimented with creative writing as a mode of transmitting what they consider the truth about the past.²³

The period of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has seen reactions against both the postmodern and the counterfactual trends. Evans (2000) has once again restated the case for an uncomplicated, objective stance, although it has been observed that in practice Evans allows for more flexibility than his polemic suggests.²⁴ Evans has returned to the theme in an assault on counterfactual history (2014). The notion of scientific history too has been revived by Tucker (2004), who seeks to distance this from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century notions of history as science by emphasising the changing notions of science rather than history. For Tucker, history is an iterative and *probabilistic* exercise. But in fact Tucker too is far from immune from deterministic influences, with considerable faith being reposed in impersonal forces, not least those of (Western market) economics. Nor indeed has the evolving philosophy of science reached a consensus. In the twenty-first century, we are no closer to a consensus on the nature and extent of historical truth, or on the limits of historiography.

Beyond Historiography

The 'postmodern' turn in historiography has seen the application of a range of different theoretical positions that share an orientation towards undermining epistemological or even ontological certainty,²⁵ or questioning stability of interpretation. Thus historical knowledge

has been brought into the debates over other types of knowledge, truths and beliefs, from philosophy on the one hand to fiction on the other. This broader trend offers possible approaches to the plurality of truths that can be seen in ancient approaches to the past, whether by reducing historical knowledge to the problems of any kind of knowledge or truth, or by expanding a range of possible truths.

To take only a few such examples, both Gadamer's hermeneutics and Derrida's deconstruction question straightforward truth, at the level of both the text and the reader (as well as historical writers and their object). For Gadamer, there is always a dialogue between a reader and a text, and understanding can never be separated from interpretation. In historical terms, there is such a thing as historical reality, but our understanding of the past is a fusion between our own 'horizon' and that of the past, a past that needs to be worked at through the layers of intervening tradition.²⁶ For Derrida, the claims of historical knowledge and interpretation can be put through the same mincer of *différance* as any other type of writing, as he particularly demonstrated in his deconstruction of Foucault's history of madness.²⁷

In other philosophical traditions, attempts to define truth have been brought into question, not least in relation to a straightforward correspondence theory.²⁸ Another way in which truth has been tackled is with the notion of possible worlds that have emerged from modal logic. These have been used to tackle a variety of discourses (or propositions) that are relevant to the problem of historical truth, including counterfactuals and fiction.²⁹ Truth no longer becomes a monolithic concept; rather we can talk of truth as referring to *sets of possible worlds*—worlds that are historically true, fictionally true, and so on. This raises the prospect of the distinction between historical and other types of worlds as one of *degree of possibility* rather than a binary truth or falsehood.

Pluralising the Past

In this climate of experimental history writing and testing of the concept of historical truth, the growing interest in cultural memory and the continuing questions being posed about the nature of truth, it must be time to return to the debate about truth in ancient historiography. This time around, rather than asking 'How truthful were the ancient historians?' or 'Why did the ancient historians lie?', we shall ask what concept or concepts of truth the ancient historiographers subscribed to, and how far their concept(s) of truth

were shared by other contemporary discourses. This question takes different forms in the different contributions to the volume, but some essential issues cut across all or most of the papers.

Within a single work of history different parts of the discourse may allow for different relationships with truth; i.e. a historical narrator may show a strict adherence to factual truth in polemical or methodological passages, but a more relaxed attitude in a narrative or speech-reporting mode. In this connection there is scope to explore how a given historiographer signals the truth value of his account through his narrative without explicitly insisting on it, and to ask what, in a given historical text, the relationship is between, say, truth and visualisation/vivid descriptions, truth and historical causation, truth and the marvellous, and truth and divine intervention.

Furthermore, to borrow (as so often) from debates around scientific method, some, at least, of the ancient historiographers adopted different historical stances dependent on how far events or actions could be verifiable or falsifiable, or by some more probabilistic criterion.³⁰ Thus they may have had different thresholds for how much invention they would allow depending on whether they were dealing with contemporary (or recent) events or with more remote events (see e.g. Th. 1.20.1; Ephor. 70 F 9 *FGrH*; D. S. 4.8.4; Plu., *Per.* 13.12). Such a distinction seems to have applied not just to temporal, but also to geographical distance, so that more invention was allowed when talking about distant lands than about one's home *polis*. Such criteria do not lead to a straightforward truth-falsehood binary (unverifiable claims meaningless, or undecidable claims unscientific): and so we shall also explore the basis on which ancient historians made truth claims about distant times and places, and what sort of truth they were then envisioning.

As the subtitle of the book suggests, most of the papers argue for a complex concept of truth in ancient literature and culture, including historiography. Complex truths can be generated by a variety of concerns such as exemplarity, generalisation, intertextuality, polemics, patterning, bias and didacticism. Rather than considering these as impediments to a truthful account, or as producers of competing accounts of the past, it may be possible to see them as generators of plural truths within understandings of the past less concerned with one factual truth than twentieth-century scholars. Perhaps, like the Gobi held up as a negative example by Woodman, the ancient Greeks and Romans were able to believe in more than one version of past events at the same time?

We are not asking so much whether historiography incorporates elements of poetic, rhetorical or narrative techniques that shape their historical accounts, or whether cultural memory is flexible, manipulated and developing, or whether in a more postmodern vein the historiographic project can be reduced to simple storytelling, but propose instead to examine pluralities of truth or belief within the ancient world, and the consequences for our understanding of culture, ancient or otherwise.

The Essays

The collection begins with three essays that explore the broad nature of the early Classical response to the past across genres. Stenger looks at the way that lyric poets play off their version of the past, whether recent or more distant, against a plurality of truths. Following this, a pair of essays examines different aspects of belief in the tragic audience, and their relation to truth, coherence and cultural memory (Ruffell, Wright). These poetic genres provide a context, both a backdrop and a point of comparison, for the emergence of historiography and its developing practices. As a bridge to the latter genre, Darbo-Peschanski directly compares the experience of truth in both tragic and historical audiences. The spine of the work is taken up by consideration of Greek historiography. Herodotus features (Darbo-Peschanski, Ellis, Wesselmann), but a mark of the volume is that it pays due attention on the one hand to figures such as Xenophon, who is not normally associated with sophisticated notions of historical truth (Baragwanath), and on the other hand to Ctesias, who is often excised from accounts of ancient historiography, such is his problematic status (Meeus). It also pays significant attention to Hellenistic and later historiography (Wiater, Hau, Roisman). The volume concludes with a move to the high Empire and Lucian's account of historiography that draws on the experience of earlier centuries. Tamiolaki examines the satirist Lucian's reflections on historiography, through which he connects his purported theory of historiography with other types of ancient narrative. In a volume committed to exploring plural notions of truth, it is appropriate that these essays demonstrate a pluralism not only of period and genre, but also of method.

Notes

- 1 We self-consciously use 'historiography' here to refer to the genre of writing about history, as distinct from its object ('history').
- 2 For a review of the developing trend, see Cubitt (2007). See, already, Finley

(1975) and Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983). For the implication of ‘professional’ history and broader memory, see, for example, Lim et al. (2014), especially the essays in part two. We have some reservations about the way that ‘memory’ is currently used as a catch-all term, which in some instances obscures the use, manipulation and invention of tradition.

- 3 Including at our own institution (see <http://www.gla.ac.uk/events/ww1/> for its World War One commemoration events [visited 19/02/15]). Current UK research policy, with its increasing interest in impact, means that such engagement with institutional and cultural memory will only increase.
- 4 Herodotus correctly identifies that the victim, Hipparchus, was the brother of the tyrant, Hippias (5.55–6) and doubts the political effectiveness of the murder of Hipparchus in ending the tyranny, which he ascribes instead to the Alcmeonids (6.123). He does, however, put the tradition of tyrannicide into the mouth of one of his characters (6.109). Thucydides is unequivocal (as Herodotus is not) that the motivation for the assassination was entirely personal and that the plot misfired (6.53–9).
- 5 On the funeral speech, see especially Ziolkowski (1981) and Loraux (1986). On cultural memory at Athens more generally, see Grethlein (2010), and, over a broader range of genres and periods, Marincola et al. (2012).
- 6 See especially Fox (1996).
- 7 For Athens, see Shear (2011); a full account of Roman reinterpretations of the late Republic in the early Empire has yet to be written, but can be seen in material as varied as Horace, Velleius Paterculus, Lucan, Seneca, Tacitus, Juvenal and Augustus himself (in the *Res Gestae*).
- 8 For Simonides, see Boedeker and Sider (2001).
- 9 See, for example, Gill and Wiseman (1993).
- 10 Woodman (1988).
- 11 Wiseman (1993).
- 12 Hellenistic historiography: Gabba (1981), Chaniotis (1988), Morgan (2007); ancient historiography more generally: Grant (1995).
- 13 Luce (1989); also Marincola (1997).
- 14 Moles (1993).
- 15 So Rhodes (1994), Bosworth (2003), Schepens (2007); also Lateiner (1989) on Herodotus, Vercruyse 1990 on Polybius.
- 16 From the preface to the first edition of 1824: *wie es eigentlich gewesen* (von Ranke 1885, 7). This is more often rendered in English, ‘how things really happened’, but we follow here the translation of Iggers and von Moltke (von Ranke 1973, 135–8); for discussion see Iggers’ introduction (von Ranke 1973, xix–xx).
- 17 See especially Lyotard (1984).
- 18 For the postmodernist challenge see e.g. White (1973; 1978; 1987), Ankersmit (1994; 2012) and Jenkins (2003; 2009).
- 19 Most recently Baragwanath and de Bakker (2012).
- 20 Fukuyama (1992), Huntington (1996).
- 21 For the criticism of Irving, see Lipstadt (1993); for reflections on the libel trial, see Evans (2001) and Lipstadt (2005).
- 22 For discussion, see Tucker (2004, 226–39) and Evans (2014), who associates counterfactual history strongly with conservative nostalgia. Ferguson’s

collection is drawing particularly on Hawthorn (1991). An important precursor is Squire (1931).

- 23 See the six special issues of *Rethinking History* (2010–16).
- 24 Hughes-Warrington (2014, 82).
- 25 The distinction between ontological and epistemological certainty is identified by McHale (1987) as distinguishing postmodernist from modernist fiction.
- 26 See especially Gadamer (2004) [first German edition 1960].
- 27 Derrida (1978) [1964/1967], critiquing Foucault (2001) [1961].
- 28 See, for example, the essays collected in Davidson (2005).
- 29 For possible worlds in modal logic, see especially Bradley and Swartz (1979). For counterfactuals, see Lewis (1973) and for fiction Lewis (1978). For further bibliography on fictional worlds, see Ruffell (2011, 29–53).
- 30 Truth as verifiability derives from logical positivism (see especially Ayer 1946). The (opposite) criterion of falsifiability was advanced by Karl Popper (1959; 1963). Developments towards a more probabilistic method have been applied to history by Tucker (2004), as noted above.

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2 The Challenging Abundance of the Past

Pluralising and Reducing in Pindar's Victory Songs

Jan R. Stenger

Epinician Poetry and the Past

When studying how the Greeks made use of their past, one would not be likely to start, beyond historiography proper, with lyric poetry of the archaic age. What rather springs to mind and lends itself to such an investigation is epic poetry, which, from its outset, claims heroic deeds of distant memory as its remit and, more often than not, emphasises the huge divide between the remote ages of the great warriors and contemporary times.¹ Lyric song, iambus and elegy, by contrast, are predominantly concerned with current events and actions such as imminent battles in martial exhortations and civil strife in Alcaeus' partisan poetry; or the extant fragments reflect seemingly personal feelings and mental states, never tired of, for example, musing about the mystery of love. And yet, although *prima facie* historical subjects appear insignificant in these genres, lyric poets did engage with what could be labelled 'history' in modern terminology. In particular, decisive moments in the history of the Greeks fascinated poets and called for depiction in verse, as in Simonides' elegies on the battles of Salamis and Plataea.² The past even became a fixture in one lyric genre that, by definition, was intended to celebrate the immediate present, namely the victory ode. It is in the praise of athletic victories before the assembled crowd that past events and deeds feature regularly, though mostly with an interesting twist. When Bacchylides in *Ode* 3 describes in graphic detail the sack of Sardis by the Persians and the downfall of its king Croesus, or when Pindar pays tribute to the tyrant Hiero's foundation of Aetna and victories in war, history is treated not *per se*, but rather serves to interpret the present occasion, in the sense that the past is a benchmark for the greatness of athletic victories.³

This strategic approach to history implies issues of stability and trustworthiness; for in order to be applied as a standard, achievements

of distant ages must become firmly established, uncontroversial and deeply rooted in the collective mind. That is precisely where the authority of the poet as ‘master of the past’ comes into play. Pindar’s epinician odes throw these concerns into sharp relief, time and again directing the audience’s attention to competing claims about historical actions and contrasting incompatible versions of well-known myths, but often displaying confidence that the acceptable version can be discerned. The most famous example of his technique is certainly *Olympian* 1, where, instead of only presenting his own take on the story of Pelops, he reviews the common, but blasphemous, account of how he was served as supper to the gods by his own father Tantalus.⁴ Pindar rejects this story as malignant lies in order that his authority as a reliable and sincere writer of the past may shine forth even more brightly. In addition, this and further examples show that the praise poet does not distinguish sharply, as moderns are wont to do, between myth and history in the strict sense; rather, the past appears as a space without demarcation, likewise encompassing the feats of Achilles, the adventures of the Argonauts, and the historic battles of Cumae and Salamis.

That said, the past’s treasure house stores not one, but, as it happens, numerous pasts. Occasionally, Pindar goes out of his way to offer to his audience in one single praise song different versions or segments of the past, in most cases allowing us but a glimpse into history without giving a full account. *Olympian* 7, for instance, actually recounts in sequence three elaborate stories about the history of Rhodes, the homeland of the victor Diagoras, and prefaces the long narrative section with a claim to truth.⁵ To similar effect, but with markedly different technique, the opening lines of *Isthmian* 7 review the history of Thebes in a lengthy series of open questions and break off the excursion, as if the poet could hardly rein in the cornucopia of Thebes’ past.⁶ These passages, by laying stress on the fluidity, and elusiveness, of historical memory, raise the awareness that distant events and deeds, even if related to one single place or person, always exist in the plural; more than that, the conundrum of pluralism, fiction and truth poses the question whether the past can be unearthed in the first place. To complicate matters further, Pindar in *Olympian* 2 flatly dismisses the possibility that past deeds, both right and wrong, can be undone, implying that history remains unchangeable.⁷

That Pindar’s relationship with history, either mythical or factual, is a multifaceted one has been recognised by scholars for some time. More than others, his odes for addressees from the island of Aegina have seen sustained interest for their engagement with the island’s mythical foundations and more recent events.⁸ Given that Aegina in

Pindar's times faced serious threats from Athens to its political role in the Greek world and its territorial integrity, it is little wonder that Classical scholars have explored how his odes reshape cultural memory in order to contribute to Aegina's refutation of rival claims and to what may be termed propaganda. Apart from the Aeginetan appropriation of the past, Pindar's uses of the past for encomiastic purposes and ethical instruction have received treatments that have illuminated important aspects of the role of history and present in the epinician.⁹ In the following, I aim to shed light on one facet of this field that has not been fully recognised in its significance for the poet's stance on history. My question is why the victory odes emphasise the ambiguous nature of history, its elusiveness, and the poet's role in shaping it. To advance our understanding of Pindar's notion of the past it seems suitable to concentrate on the alternation between pluralising and reducing because this can afford insight into how the poet shapes fluid memories so that they can be utilised for the purposes of praise.

Aegina's Preoccupation with the Past

It is a staple of Pindar's odes for athletes of Aegina, acknowledged by the poet himself, that there is no song celebrating an islander's achievement that does not make mention of the sons of Aeacus, at least in cursory fashion.¹⁰ The colonisation of the island Oenone, led by the nymph Aegina's son Aeacus, the fate and exile of his offspring, Peleus and Telamon, and the exploits of the following generations, Achilles, Ajax and Neoptolemus, before Troy: all these heroic deeds feature prominently, in one way or another, in the Aeginetan odes.¹¹ Broadly speaking, the songs promote the idea that the greatest Greek warriors by any standard have their home on the island, in spite of their being connected to other territories as well, in particular Thessaly and Salamis. Since Pindar emphasises the links of the Aeacidae with the island and its population throughout, the myths relating to Achilles and Ajax in particular are laid as the cornerstone of fifth-century Aeginetan memory and play a vital role in self-definition towards the Panhellenic public. The legendary accounts of the sons and grandsons of Aeacus proved congenial to this undertaking as the tradition and Homer's *Iliad* had left enough room for improvisation about their origin that Pindar could fill the voids in order to create a coherent and authoritative version of the mythic past. By doing this, he invested Aegina with a long and venerable tradition, which its population could draw on in their political and military rivalries with Athens and Megara.¹²

In this context, it is essential to bear in mind that in all likelihood Pindar's odes for victors from Aegina, commissioned within a period of about forty years (485–46), were performed, perhaps also re-performed, before the same families and audiences.¹³ It can be surmised that Pindar had been briefed to a certain extent by the commissioning families who seem to have had an interest in disseminating Aeginetan ideology. We should not forget here that the 'unheralded war' (Herodotus 5.81.2) between the island and Athens in the late 490s, Aegina's prominent role at Salamis and recent Athenian threats were a fertile ground for the political exploitation of mythic traditions.¹⁴ Further and striking evidence is provided by the spectacular remnants of the temple of Aphaia, whose pediment sculptures extolled the very same heroes, Telamon, Achilles, Ajax and Neoptolemus, as Aegina's 'founding fathers'.¹⁵ The pediments captured their prominent role in the most memorable events in history, the two Trojan Wars, and made visible to every visitor that it was there, in Aegina, that it all started. It has even been argued that Pindar in *Olympian* 8 makes reference to the artistic images, with the effect that poetry and art come together to make the case for Aegina's claim to Hellenic leadership.¹⁶ Once more, the fifth-century islanders seized the opportunity to capitalise on the past when they not only manned a substantial contingent for the sea battle against the Persians but also, on account of an oracle, sent the cult images of the Aeacidae to Salamis to achieve the turnaround.¹⁷ Considering that the rival Athenians laid claim to Ajax as one of their *phyle* heroes and in order to justify their possession of Salamis, we can hardly fail to notice the significance of the past under such political conditions. Pedimental sculpture, cult images and rituals intersected with literature in a way suggesting that history is far from being a fixed, holistic given, but is contested, needs to be reconstructed and can be reworked in order to be meaningful to different audiences.

A fine case in point, which illustrates the complexity of the past in Classical Aegina, is *Nemean* 5 for the young Pytheas, who won the pankration in c. 483.¹⁸ If there was any obstacle to the exploitation of the island's legendary beginnings, it was the fact that, according to the established tradition, Telamon and Peleus had killed their half-brother Phocus and were subsequently forced to leave Aegina. This uncomfortable fact was the reason why the following generation, Achilles and Ajax, became linked to other parts of Greece, but not to Aegina. Since Pindar wanted to claim both heroes for his island audience he could not ignore fratricide and exile, and had to deal with this matter in an appropriate way. To overcome this hurdle, Pindar found a solution that enabled him to have his cake and eat it: after

mentioning Endais' sons, Telamon and Peleus, and their brother Phocus, he briefly shows them united in prayer to Hellenius (10–13). But then, with a remark on Aegina's fame for ships and heroes, for which the brothers pray, he suddenly breaks off, saying (14–18):

αἰδέομαι μέγα εἶπεῖν

ἐν δίκῃ τε μὴ κεκινδυνευμένον,

πῶς δὴ λίπον εὐκλέα νῆσον,

καὶ τίς ἄνδρας ἀλκίμους

δαίμων ἅπ' Οἰνῶνας ἔλασεν.

στάσομαι· οὐ τοι ἅπασα κερδίων

φαίνοισα πρόσωπον ἀλάθει' ἄτρεκές·

καὶ τὸ σιγᾶν πολλάκις ἐστὶ σοφώ-

τατον ἀνθρώπῳ νοῆσαι.

I scruple to tell the great deed, both just

and unjust, that was risked and done,

or how they abandoned this fair-famed

isle, and which god drove

such valiant men away from Oinona.

I stand mute! Blunt truth does not

always uncover her face to advantage:

silence is sometimes the prime mode

that any man can devise.

In another case of the break-off formula, the poet decides not to deal in detail with the issue of whether Telamon and Peleus killed their half-brother by accident or by design. Certainly, he concedes that the fratricide cannot simply count as an act of justice, nor can he reverse the plot of the myth in its substance. However, the poetic device of interruption and deliberate silence, seemingly spontaneous, allows him to broach the wrongdoing and immediately gloss over it. Moreover, he balances the awkward detail by foregrounding harmony between the siblings and the role of divine intervention or destined fate (16, δαίμων). The impact of destiny on human life is also the link that parallels the sons of Aeacus with the honorand Pytheas and his

family, who again have demonstrated by their athletic achievements that, as Pindar insists, the outcome of every deed is determined by fate (40–41, *πότημος δὲ κρίνει*). The parallel, the song suggests, is even closer as the members of Lampon's family also left the island to become famous for their excellence, just as Telamon, Peleus and their offspring had done earlier.

Further, *Nemean* 5 is, to a certain extent, required to make brief reference to Aegina as Peleus' homeland because Pindar in this ode devotes the central mythical section to the famous wedding of the hero with Thetis, which would result in the birth of Achilles (22–39). Only by inserting mention, albeit superficial, of Peleus' expulsion from his native island is the poet able to appropriate the story of his wedding for the fifth-century population. What he suggests with this myth is that the legends around Peleus and his son Achilles, although situated in remote regions, are actually based on Aegina and can be considered an integral part of its history. The crime, which may seem reprehensible from an ethical viewpoint, is presented merely as an extremely allusive sketch, just sufficient to play its vital role in the history of Aegina as a human settlement and provide a link between past and present. In fact, as Burnett rightly notes, Pindar refrains from criticising Peleus or Telamon in the slightest.¹⁹ Instead, he dismisses any attempt to judge the crime by standards of justice and injustice as impossible (14), leaving no doubt that Aegina remains 'glorious' (15) even after the departure of the two 'brave' warriors (15).

What is striking about Pindar's employment of the past in *Nemean* 5 is his ambivalent stance on distant memories. He seems to have it either way: on the one hand, he implicitly acknowledges that there are some historical deeds that are uncomfortable or might arouse indignation, but cannot be made undone. The only solution available is to handle them in as decent a manner as possible so that they can be amalgamated into a positive narrative. On the other hand, he introduces into his song the poet's control over the past. Given the plethora of myths connected with a place, it is up to him to select what he deems suitable and irreproachable. By briefly sketching the mythical fratricide as a foil, only to keep a dignified silence, Pindar intimates that, when talking about Aegina, he is faced with a wealth of stories and, therefore, has the task to choose those elements of the past that he considers useful for his encomiastic purposes.²⁰ Instead of delving into the details of Phocus' violent death and the subsequent displacement, the poet decides to concentrate on the splendid wedding of Peleus and Thetis to lend glamour to the addressee's glorious deeds. Consequently, Pindar's engagement with the past is a creative act, a process that involves circumspection, choice and great

discrimination. With every decision, he rewrites history and contributes to shaping the cultural memory of his audience. However, if the poet in command of the past decides not to tell the whole story, but to reduce the challenging plurality, then this creative act entails serious consequences with regard to truth. *Nemean* 5, to be sure, is far from bending the truth and overwriting it with beguiling fiction. Although highlighting his own decision, Pindar never admits to deviating from the path of truth. Nevertheless, he insists, it is not always profitable that ‘the whole truth displays her face unveiled’ (17). In other words, by hinting at the multitude of histories and reducing it, the poet allows us only a glimpse of a segment in the historical continuum. Epinician history writing is in essence a balancing act between rejection and positive choice.

How the potentially endless supply of Aeginetan pasts needs to be narrowed down to send a political message to the Panhellenic audience, is further illustrated by another ode that Lampon’s family commissioned on occasion of an athletic victory, *Isthmian* 6. Some years after Pytheas had won the Nemean pankration, his brother Phylacidas added the crown in the boys’ pankration at the Isthmus to the family’s record.²¹ As in all odes composed for this aristocratic clan, Pindar presents the reputation of Lampon’s house, the race of Aeacus and the *polis* of Aegina in close proximity. He even goes as far as claiming that there is virtually a self-imposed law that the poet deal with the descendants of Aeacus when he comes to the island to heap praise on it (19–21): ‘To you, O Aiakid drivers of chariots, I declare this as my plainest rule: ever to rain down praise upon you, when I walk this isle!’ Unsurprisingly, the ensuing mythical section features again the outstanding Aeacid heroes, Peleus, Telamon and his son Ajax, and their accomplishments in battle. The narrative then focuses again on a wedding, this time of Peleus’ younger brother Telamon, which is attended by Heracles. And just as in *Nemean* 5, the splendid wedding foreshadows the engendering of a great warrior: instead of Achilles, it is now the second-best hero before Troy, Ajax, whose birth is announced by the guest Heracles.²²

Aptly, *Isthmian* 6 makes much of Telamon’s begetting Ajax and lends even greater weight to parentage as it virtually inserts the son of Alcmena into the Aeacid lineage; Heracles by his prominent role in the wedding narrative somehow becomes Ajax’s adoptive father.²³ That sits squarely with the ode’s brief as the poet throughout lays stress on father–son relationships and praises the victor’s father Lampon rather than the boy Phylacidas himself. Consequently, the members of the Psalychiad clan with their athletic record and strong kinship ties appear as the perfect match for the Aegina-based descendants of

Aeacus. Once again, for this poetic revision of Telamon's and Ajax's myth it was vital to anchor the two heroes firmly to Aegina, and this is what Pindar does, not only by prefacing the narrative with his self-imposed law, but also when, during the course of the myth, he reminds us that Heracles came to enlist the 'Aiakid hero' for his campaign against Troy (35–6). In addition, Pindar gained an excellent opportunity to underpin his claim with hard evidence; for when he underlined the close ties between Heracles, the descendants of Aeacus and the island Aegina, he was able to capitalise on the recently rebuilt temple of Aphaia and its pediment sculptures. Every *polis* citizen could contemplate the pediments, which displayed Heracles as an archer prominently on the east facade and the two generations of Aeacus' offspring on both sides of the temple; there he would find corroboration of what the poet in his victory ode heralded as the cornerstone of Aeginetan identity. The temple's location and visibility suggest that this message was targeted also at Aegina's Athenian rivals, and the sculptures in particular will have caught the eye of anyone sailing by, thus addressing an even wider Greek audience.²⁴ No wonder then, that Pindar did not let this opportunity go, but, as scholars have shown, makes references to the sculpture programme, even though he makes some significant changes in the arrangement of the protagonists.²⁵

And yet, the Aeacid legend is more than meets the eye: Pindar does not confine himself to setting the pediment sculptures into music and words, with only minor adjustments. Instead, he is fairly frank about his intentions and, interestingly, about the nature of the mythical past. Before he enters the narrative proper, the poet makes some reflections as a prelude, which invites the audience to listen to the story from a specific angle (24–7):

οὐδ' ἔστιν οὕτω βάρβαρος
οὔτε παλίγλωσσος πόλις,
ἄτις οὐ Πηλῆος ἄττει κλέος ἥ-
ρωος, εὐδαίμονος γαμβροῦ θεῶν,
οὐδ' ἄτις Αἴαντος Τελαμωνιάδα
καὶ πατρός . . .

There is no city so brutish, so wrong-tongued, as
not to have heard of the

glory of Peleus, hero and, by his marriage,

blessed kin to the gods,

or of Ajax, Telamon's son, or indeed

of that father

This introductory remark increases the audience's awareness of the wider context in which their use of the past is to be understood. Appropriating the eminent Greek heroes is not only a valuable tool in enhancing the identities of excellent individuals and Aegina's aristocratic clans within the *polis* community, but also makes a bold statement towards other Greek city-states. For a *polis* like Aegina, which, as a seafaring nation, relied on international trade and its standing in the wider Greek world, it was essential to maintain their rank among the leading states and refute any rival claims. In order to buttress the islanders' collective identity in inter-*polis* competition, *Isthmian* 6 then goes on to relate in detail why their claim to the Aeacidae, and even Heracles, is justified. Straightforward as this strategy may seem, the matter, Pindar suggests, requires more thought and careful consideration.

The poet prepares the mythic narrative with further comments, which shed additional light on the myth's significance. We have noticed above regarding *Nemean* 5 that history and in particular multiple histories do not readily offer themselves for use for current purposes. Instead, the abundance of past events requires an expert in historiography, who is capable of discerning, as it were, the main thread behind the puzzling multitude and weaving it into a coherent texture. In *Isthmian* 6, it is exactly this alternation between pluralising and reducing that Pindar foregrounds before embarking upon the narrative. After having established the rule of Aeacid praise in lines 19–21, the poet, still addressing the 'Aeacid drivers of chariots', adds (22–3):

μυρίαι δ' ἔργων καλῶν τέ-

τιμανθ' ἑκατόμπεδοι ἐν σχερῶ κέλευθοι

καὶ πέραν Νεῖλοιο παγᾶν καὶ δι' Ὑπερβορέους;

Ten thousand paths your fair deeds have cut, each

a hundred feet broad and stretching

up from the source of the Nile to lands beyond Boreas.

Not only is, as the verses quoted earlier indicate, the story of Aeacus'

race paramount as the bedrock of Aeginetan cultural memory in a Panhellenic context, but it offers, at the same time, a multitude of roads to travel, a network stretching from the far north to the extremes of the south. As the audience of Pindar's Aeginetan performances would have been fully aware, the island's past encompassed numerous tales, from the eponymous nymph to the murder of Phocus to Neoptolemus' accomplishments. Hence, it was necessary to pick from plural histories one or another to make a specific point in a public celebration. Should the audience not have grasped Pindar's point, the ode concludes the narrative section with just another comment on the poet's role in reshaping the past. Once Heracles, as a virtual prophet, has christened the promised child 'Ajax the mighty' (53), the victory ode in its typical manner cuts the story short: '[t]his said, he sat, and the brave deeds that followed are more than I can recount . . . my speech will be short, Argive, indeed, in its brevity' (ὥς ἦρα εἰπὼν αὐτίκα ἔζετ'. ἐμοὶ δὲ μακρὸν πάσας <ἀν>αγήσασθ' ἀρετάς . . . τὸν Ἀργείων τρόπον εἰρήσεταιί που κἂν βραχίστοις, 55–9).

By doing this, Pindar has said just enough to reclaim Telamon for the cultural memory of the Aeginetan community and, moreover, hint that Ajax, the lord of Salamis, is indissolubly linked with Aegina, so that it is no longer necessary to relate the whole mythic tradition in detail. Anyone listening attentively would have understood the implied message, not least the Athenians who at that time had already seized control over Salamis.²⁶ Seen against the backdrop of ongoing rivalries between Aegina, Megara and Athens concerning Salamis and its heroes, Pindar's choice of a specific segment of the historical continuum emerges as a deliberate strategy to furnish the Aeginetan ambitions with historical legitimacy, that is to say, to exploit the distant past as a propaganda instrument.²⁷ Consequently, there is a pluralism of pasts on yet another level, because the mythic events mean different things to different people, even though Pindar has narrowed down the array of countless paths to virtue to just one single strand. Leslie Kurke has argued that Pindar's victory odes cater for the interests and needs of several audiences, the victor's household, the aristocratic peers and the *polis* as a whole, in order to reintegrate the honorand into the community.²⁸ Concerning *Isthmian* 6, I would like to suggest that the ode's peculiar stance on Telamon's wedding and Ajax's birth is meant not only to reflect the combined accomplishments and reputation of Lampon's house, but also to enhance the 'Aeacid identity' of the island's aristocracy, as well as to counter Athenian threats.

Essentially, Pindar's engagement with the past in *Isthmian* 6 is a

complicated one. First, the poet's references to the endless supply of remote deeds, together with the break-off formula, intimate that whoever looks back to the past is faced with a cornucopia of noteworthy events that might enter cultural memory. Secondly, however, pointing towards this wealth of stories, Pindar by virtue of his authority as storyteller reduces the amount of available legends to one coherent narrative in what might be called a creative process of reconstructing or reshaping the past. And yet the reconstructed historical narrative is, thirdly, anything but a reduction in meaning, as it offers several readings to different audiences in different communicative settings in the present. To elucidate further the complex interplay of past, present, poet and audience response, we should have a look at the final ode that the Psalychiad clan commissioned from Pindar.

***Isthmian* 5: Trojan Wars, Salamis, Athletic Victories**

‘But, with Aiakids absent, my heart can’t savour a song!’ With this bold claim, quoted above (n. 10), Pindar interrupts his praise of the young scions of Lampon’s house in *Isthmian* 5 before he turns, after further encomiastic comments, to heroic deeds of old. Already the eye-catching hyperbaton, τὸ δ’ ἐμὸν, οὐκ ἄτερ Αἰακιδᾶν, κέαρ (19–20), signals that the descendants of Aeacus are implanted in everyone’s mind, and the poet’s in particular, when it comes to praise songs for athletes from Aegina.²⁹ This statement reminds the audience that there is a firm link between the island Aegina, the race of Aeacus and praise poetry; that the mythic heroes are virtually present in the occasion of the celebration, amid the fifth-century islanders. *Isthmian* 5 was composed for the young boy Phylacidas, who had won in the discipline of the boys’ pankration at the Isthmus again and, in doing so, carried forward the family’s renown. And again, Lampon approached the Theban poet to glorify the latest of his sons’ achievements. The date of Phylacidas’ triumph cannot be firmly established because of the lack of external evidence, but it is clear that it was after the Greek victory over the Persian fleet at Salamis, as Pindar twice makes unambiguous reference to this historic event.³⁰ Interestingly enough, the ode deals with a specific incident in contemporary history, which is quite exceptional in his oeuvre, given that Pindar otherwise preferred covering the remote heroic age or merely including general excursions into the past. Presumably, he did not want to miss the unique opportunity to exploit an event that had seen the Aeginetans at the forefront. Indeed, they had manned the

third-largest contingent among the Greek allies to drive off the Persian invaders.³¹

To modern readers it might seem an oddity that *Isthmian* 5 suggests any connection or even parallel between a pivotal moment in Greek history and the athletic victory of a youngster, but that is precisely what Pindar does in this ode. As in all the eleven Aeginetan songs, *Isthmian* 5 presents the key themes of the family's athletic reputation, the illustrious deeds of the Aeacidae and the *polis*, supplemented by typical reflections on the wide range of potential achievements and human dependency on divine favour. Since the ensemble of these motifs already makes up the bulk of *Isthmian* 6, we may infer that Lampon and his clan had a vital interest in disseminating this message among the citizens, and wider audiences. What strikes the eye in *Isthmian* 5 is that the chorus repeatedly switches in sudden turns from present to past and back again. After musing on timeless insights into human achievement and human contingency in the opening passage (1–16), the singers make the transition to the current victor and further successes accomplished by the family (17–19), only to interrupt the praise and briefly touch upon the Aeacidae (19–20). Hardly have they been mentioned than the topic is dropped to give way to the Psalychiads again (20–21). However, once more with general remarks, Pindar shifts the attention to ancient warrior heroes, including Perseus and the Dioscuri (26–33). This section in the form of a priamel paves the way for mythic sketches of the Aeacid engagement in the two Trojan Wars (33–45). All at once, without delving into the story, the chorus jumps back to the present, signposted by the particle καὶ νῦν (48), to celebrate the triumph at Salamis (48–50). This brings closure to the song as it reintroduces the praise of Lampon's line into the final section. Faced with such a flurry of time shifts we may wonder whether all this adds up to a coherent message; or to put it differently, whether the seemingly erratic train of thought puts the song's unity at risk. Hilary Mackie has argued that the epinician use of the past is somewhat contradictory but that its ambiguity is to a certain degree mitigated insofar as the past is always subordinated to the present. Pindar's 'attitude towards the past', she claims, 'appears incoherent or inconsistent', because of the rhetorical nature of its presentation.³² In what follows, we shall study more closely whether the complex or contradictory relationship between past and present can really be resolved by postulating a hierarchy between them. The sudden time shifts might suggest that their interplay is rather an ongoing process.

To answer this question, it is first necessary to examine what the role and significance of the past in *Isthmian* 5 is. A clue is provided by

the passage where Pindar for the first time in this ode turns to ancient heroes. After having outlined Phylacidas' and his brother Pytheas' glories he abruptly inserts his general rule that he cannot think of a song without the Aeacidae. By this juxtaposition or sudden move, the poet highlights that recent exploits immediately call heroic deeds of the past to mind. What the victor has attained of late virtually evokes, as Pindar says elsewhere, distant periods and figures.³³ Apparently, it is not only the present that is, in Pindar's own words, 'before one's feet', but at the same time while contemplating the immediate present we cannot but likewise think of historical achievements.³⁴ The function of the present as a trigger for recollections of the past is further evident when the epinician songs use the phrase 'and now', 'now too', which in *Isthmian* 5 serves to make the transition from Achilles' triumphs to the recent victory over the Persians.³⁵ Such leaps across chronological gaps, unlike in epic, do not stress the distance, and difference, between what happened in the heroic age and contemporary events. Quite the reverse: Pindar employs this technique so that analogies and parallels between them are thrown into high relief. It may go too far to postulate a circular structure of history; all the same, it is at least safe to say that according to Pindar certain patterns resurface across the times, which enable the poet to present them side by side.

This observation brings us to the central narrative section of the ode, the brief catalogue of Greek heroes, followed by sketchy accounts of the Trojan Wars (30–45). There, we also encounter what we might call the re-presentation of the past. The passage falls into three parts: first, a short list of famous heroes and their locales acts as a prelude to the Aeacid part proper, and notably, the only verb that it contains is in the present (33, γέρας ἔχει). The mighty sons of Oeneus, we hear, have honour among the Aetolians, the charioteer Iolaus in Thebes, Perseus in Argos, and Castor and Pollux at the Eurotas. This priamel is then, in the second part, capped by the reference to the Aegina-based sons of Aeacus and their two expeditions against Troy, with Heracles and with the Atreidae. All at once, in the third part, Pindar makes a fresh start and focuses with a series of questions on the slayer of Hector, Achilles. He is not mentioned by name, though. It is important to note here that Pindar falls far short of giving a full account of the heroes' glorious deeds and instead is content with just some name dropping and superficial allusions to Achilles' record of triumphs. What he rather seems to be interested in is a common theme or general idea that ties Oeneus' sons, Iolaus, Perseus, the Dioscuri and Achilles together. Apart from the fact that they all are brave young warriors who excelled in one way or the other in battles and athletic

games, the common idea is apparently the connection to a specific place or region in Greece, since in every instance the poet makes mention of their home and finally sums up the whole section with a reference to Aegina. Consequently, Pindar's main interest here is that all these heroes and demi-gods are part of the cultural memory of the local population; they figure prominently in the people's collective identity as is evidenced by their ongoing cult practice. This recurring motif, then, draws attention to what the song's specific stance on the Aeacid legacy is: while Lampon's sons are certain to recognise themselves and their victories in the figures of the past, the mythical section is, in a broader perspective, rather about the foundation of Aegina's cultural memory in the past.

The island's cultural memory with its basis in the times of the Aeacidae is far from a completed story, though. It represents, as the ode implies, a living process, a book that is open to additions and modifications, and hence to pluralism. No sooner has Pindar highlighted the heroes' attachment to Aegina than he makes the transition to his own times. While the reflections on the multiplicity of paths to praising their deeds still look back to Achilles and the other descendants of Aeacus, Pindar frustrates our expectation that he will carry on with narrating their legend, and decides to turn to the sailors at Salamis' shores. By this leap across the centuries, emphasised by the temporal adverb 'so now', he makes plain that the victorious Aeginetans in 480 have opened a new chapter in the *polis* memory. Since what they achieved against the Persians resembles Achilles' fight against the Trojans, their triumph is worth inscribing in the record book of the islanders' glories.³⁶ The typically epinician way of linking past and present or rather interweaving them suggests that the past is never finished, but continues to be written.

Consequently, *Isthmian* 5 conveys a multilayered notion of the past. Regarding the content side of incidents worth remembering, it is first and foremost the exploits of excellent warriors, displaying common features, that are suitable for recording and narrating. With respect to the 'owners' of the past, the function of historical narratives is to build local identity, manifested in cultural memory. And finally, Pindar's idea of the past is that of a continuum encapsulated in a coherent narrative; contemporary events like the battle of Salamis become myths and subsequently enter the collective mind. This epinician strategy, the mythologisation of contemporary history, finds a striking parallel, as Bruno Currie has argued, in the ancient funeral orations, where the speakers harmonise remote legends and recent events in order to foster collective memory and instil pride.³⁷ This being so, there emerges a dynamic between past and present: the past, never

finished and always offering a multitude of roads, seems to be inevitably present as it has a direct bearing on contemporary events, while in turn being illuminated by them. In essence, it is a renewal of the past, though not a single past.

Incomplete and unstable as it is, history both affords an opportunity and poses a challenge, not least to the poet dealing with it. Given that the past contains countless events that are potentially noteworthy, there is also a multiplicity of vantage points for anchoring Aeginetan identity. Since their past cannot be pinned down to one defining moment in history, but encompasses numerous ‘arrows’, that is, historic deeds, the islanders are stimulated to consider on what to base their cultural memory.³⁸ Their ancestors’ involvement in the two Trojan Wars, the repulse of the Persians and athletic competitions all offer building blocks of collective self-definition. Consequently, if the individual wants to learn a lesson from the past he is faced with a seemingly endless supply of outstanding role models, from Telamon to Achilles and Ajax, to the fifth-century sailors and excellent athletes like Pytheas and Phylacidas. The plurality of historical moments and figures is, indeed, nicely encapsulated in the questions about Achilles mentioned above (39–41). Strikingly, although it was, as everyone knows, one individual hero who killed Cynus and Hector, the interrogative pronoun *τίνες* and the verb in the plural seem to suggest that the poet is looking for more than one figure. However, regardless of their differences in significance and fame, all warriors share the core characteristics: they have attained *kleos* through their effort (4–10, 26–8) and never betrayed their attachment to Aeacus’ island. Furthermore, the continuity among the Aeacidae and the members of Lampon’s family, respectively, illuminate how people can connect with the past.³⁹

Wherever one looks for guidance and a point to derive a sense of direction from, one will find individuals, groups and events of different scales that are valuable foci for emulation and enhancing a sense of belonging. The broad spectrum of models implies that the past means different things to different people. Depending on the aims of the individual, the family or the *polis* as a whole, historical exempla can be utilised to embody individual excellence, the relevance of kinship ties or Aegina’s prominent place across the ages, or indeed, all these qualities at once. From the praise poet’s perspective, the fluidity of the past might come as a challenge, in particular when considering the vicissitudes of human life. Throughout *Isthmian* 5, Pindar reminds his audience of the contingency of man and his dependency on divine approval.⁴⁰ This epinician commonplace might render any human ambition futile and wipe out any attempt to emulate the heroes of the

past. However, Pindar reassures us, it is possible to discern lessons behind historical deeds, which can then in turn serve as guidelines. Repeatedly, the ode reveals that all the achievements mentioned are emblematic of the fundamental principle that human success is possible, provided that the gods, especially Zeus as the supreme ruler, grant their favour. By making the underlying principles evident, Pindar underlines the thread running through the centuries, so as to balance human contingency.⁴¹ In doing so, he hints that only if coherence and memory are established amid the mass of events can the past be fruitfully applied to the present.

That task, however, requires expertise, training in historical investigation. Unsurprisingly, Pindar imagines none other than himself doing this job. Speaking of investigation here is particularly apt as the poet himself directs his audience's attention to the research-like character of history writing. While he begins the song's central section with a list of persons, places and events, the latter part of it refrains from describing the Pelides' victories. Instead, Pindar offers those who are listening a series of questions, without giving any answers (39–42). Certainly, no one will be at a loss about the identity of the one who killed Cycnus and Hector, and Memnon, or who wounded Telephus on the shores of the Caicus river. Yet, not unlike the poet of the *Iliad* and similar to *Olympian* 10, Pindar with this quest for the hero indicates that the reconstruction of the past demands intellectual skills, an interest in causality and intense scrutiny.⁴² In a similar way as Homer does in the *Iliad*'s opening lines, the praise poet claims that by virtue of his expertise he has found out what constitutes the local history. That that is in fact an effort is intimated by a line preceding the references to great warriors, where Pindar emphasises the longevity of poetic encomia of glories: 'wise men', the poets, by their activities have bridged the chronological gap between distant events and the present. This is an onerous task (μελέτων, 28).

Since heroic achievements are by nature remote in terms of time and constitute a vast amount of material for praise, the epinician poet faces the challenge of establishing the facts with discrimination. This intellectual activity includes selection of relevant facts, highlighting of key moments and, as *Olympian* 1 has shown, rejecting problematic versions. It amounts, *Isthmian* 5 adds, even to a creative process: 'My lips make the outstanding island of Aegina the fatherland for these heroes', Pindar boasts in the climax of the narrative section (τοῖσιν Αἴγιναν προφέρει στόμα πάτρην, διαπρεπέα νῆσον, 43–4). With this bold move, he makes plain that, were it not for his poetic craft, the famous descendants of Aeacus would never be associated with the island in the first place. The specifically Aeginetan reconstruction of

the past relies to the largest extent on the poet's historical expertise, which succeeds in revealing the hidden links. Further techniques share in the process of shaping history. One method conducive to Pindar's history teaching is juxtaposition. Often he presents achievements and events of different times side by side, sometimes in abrupt transition, at other times providing explicit links as in line 48. The hidden nexus between past and present is further enhanced by the insertion of general reflections, *gnomai*, which are an essential ingredient of epinician odes.⁴³ They help the audience to come to terms with the confusing plurality of the past by reducing it to the basic principles that drive the historical process. As authorial comments markedly different from narrative in tone, they shine a light on the paradigmatic value of the past in order to make history comprehensible.

Yet, the creative part in this intellectual process does not automatically rule out the veracity of the historical account. It has long been recognised that Pindar has a major concern with truth and lies, often related to considerations of propriety. Time and again, he not only insists that the wise poet will stick to truth, but also vocally promotes the idea of due measure and avoiding excess. It is little wonder that this idea has a bearing on the reconstruction of the past. In reshaping historic moments Pindar is not free to invent deeds, nor is he allowed to heap undue praise on historical characters. To the contrary, he remains bound to what has happened, a belief that is also presented in *Isthmian* 5 and possibly with a certain twist (48–51):

... καὶ νῦν ἐν Ἄρει μαρτυρήσαι
 κεν πόλις Αἴαντος ὀρθωθεῖσα ναύταις
 ἐν πολυφθόρῳ Σαλαμῖς Διὸς ὄμβρῳ
 ἀναρίθμων ἀνδρῶν χαλαζᾶεντι φόνῳ.
 ἀλλ' ὅμως καύχῃμα κατάβρεχε σιγᾷ·

... but today,
 tested by Ares, the city of Ajax bears witness that
 she was upheld by our sailors—
 she, Salamis!—during the ruinous Zeus-made
 storm, when blood fell like hail from countless
 men.⁴⁴ But drown all such vaunting in silence!

Interestingly, the poet not only calls to witness Ajax's city, Salamis, to corroborate that his account is factual, but, cutting the story short, he even rejects outright the idea of boasting and embellishing the facts. Presumably, when he reminds the audience of this guiding principle, he wants to insinuate that rival claims to the triumph at Salamis are totally unwarranted.⁴⁵ After all, the Aeacidae in the form of their wooden images were on board the Aeginetan ship that initiated the battle. Whatever competitors such as Athens may brag about is unfounded vanity and not historically reliable.

To conclude our discussion of *Isthmian* 5 and the role of the past in it, we should address the question why all this matters in a celebration party on Aegina shortly after 480. We have seen that Pindar deliberately lays bare the ambivalent nature of history, which oscillates between a puzzling plurality of side roads and the high road to memory. In any predominantly oral culture, it is vital to transmit a coherent narrative to bridge the floating gap between a remote past and more recent events. Only then are people able to connect with what happened in former times. Therefore, Pindar's Aeginetan odes seek to inaugurate and transmit cultural memory against the backdrop of internal rifts and external conflict. At the time when he was composing his songs for the Psalychiad clan, Aegina faced threats from its principal rival, Athens. In the war of the 490s and 480s it had been dealt a severe blow that put its role in the Greek power play at risk. Simultaneously, the island's aristocracy was divided between rivalling factions, one of which had no qualms about enlisting the help of the Athenians. Similarities between the songs for Lampon's family make it plausible that the clan wanted to make a political statement in this situation.⁴⁶ The praise poet vocally promoted the Aeginetans' close links with the heroic past and created out of histories in the plural a coherent, single-track narration that corroborated the island's rank among the Greeks. This past was meant to inform the perspective on the recent triumph at Salamis, in order to preclude from the outset any competing claims, both to the possession of Salamis and the *aristeia* in the battle. Salamis' prominent place in the ode suggests that, even though the island's recovery was not a strategic or realistic goal, the Aeginetans were keen to maintain their claim before the Panhellenic public, perhaps in order to compensate for the actual impossibility of enforcing it. Finally, by including Heracles in the mythical section, Pindar once more championed close ties between Thebes and Aegina, as he had done before in *Isthmian* 6 in more detail. Only an unambiguous, i.e. single, past, reconstructed as a continuum of similar actions, was suitable for legitimising the present in this way.

Pindar's Vision of the Past

The past in Pindar's victory odes emerges as an elusive thing. Often, the poet when looking for parallels to present occasions evokes a number of histories rather than one single moment. He does so, however, only to narrow down the multiplicity of paths to one coherent continuum. As the characteristic device of the priamel nicely encapsulates, pluralism operates just as a foil to oneness. The reduction of diversity is further enhanced by explicit narrator comments, frequently in the form of *gnomai*, to the effect that the past(s) ultimately boil(s) down to one defined principle that is capable of subsuming all individual events and integrating them in a narration. What we perceive as the past is, Pindar intimates, already an interpretation.

It is striking that Pindar chooses not to gloss over the constructivism of history, but quite the contrary raises awareness of the alternation between pluralising and reducing. As a result, his own role as a reliable authority on the past is very much in the foreground. History constitutes a challenge or intellectual endeavour that asks for an accomplished researcher such as the 'wise men'. This entails another ambiguity because history as a poetic construct might arouse suspicion over its truthfulness. In order to dispel disbelief, Pindar reassures that what he offers never abandons the path of truth and propriety, whereas others may be inclined to distort and exaggerate the facts.

The reason why the poet feels the need to address the complexity of the past is that the engagement with ancient events is inherent in the literary genre. No victory ode can do without a glance to what happened in former times because epinician poetry wants to extol recent glories by applying an accepted benchmark. The past needs to be rendered meaningful so that it can contribute to understanding present achievements. In such a context, often faced with competing claims of individuals, groups and *poleis*, Pindar reconstructs a past that is simultaneously plural and singular. On the one hand, it offers an abundance of versions, perspectives and foci; on the other hand, it must be reduced to a coherent thread so that it can serve as legitimisation and didactic in the public arena. In this respect, Pindar's Aeginetan odes come close to ancient historiography.

Notes

- 1 See Grethlein (2006; 2012) for Homer's engagement with the heroic past.

- 2 Simonides fr. 8–9 W and P. Oxy. 3965 (fr. 10–18 W). Cf. Boedeker and Sider (2001); Grethlein (2010, 47–73).
- 3 Bacchylides 3.23–62; Pindar, *Pythian* 1.30–33 (Aetna), 47–52 (battles), 60–62 (Aetna), 72–80 (battle of Cumae, parallel to the Persian Wars). See Mackie (2003), Grethlein (2010, 19–46) and Pavlou (2012) for different aspects of Pindar's treatment of the past.
- 4 Pindar, *Olympian* 1.25–100, with Pindar's explicit rejection of the offensive version of the myth in 28–35 and 52–3. See Vöhler (2005).
- 5 Pindar, *Olympian* 7.20–81, with line 21 (ξυνὸν ἀγγέλλων διορθῶσαι λόγον 'proclaiming my message I will tell correctly the story that concerns all').
- 6 Pindar, *Isthmian* 7.1–21. Break-off formulas have been recognised as a typical feature of Pindar's poetry; cf. Mackie (2003, 9–37).
- 7 Pindar, *Olympian* 2.15–18: 'But when some deed has been done, right or wrong, not even Time, the father of all things, can undo its outcome; yet with the help of good fortune men may forget it.' Cf. Grethlein (2010, 38).
- 8 Burnett (2005); Fearn (2011); Stenger (2014), all with references to previous scholarship.
- 9 Mackie (2003) discusses the tensions between past and present; Grethlein (2010, 19–46) focuses on the relationship between contingency and historical memory in *Olympian* 2; Pavlou (2012) explores Pindar's role as a master of time, who can rewrite the past. For Pindar's conception of historical time see Theunissen (2000, esp. 575–91). Hornblower (2004), studying the epinician odes in their historical environment, even goes as far as to claim a close relationship between Pindar and Thucydides.
- 10 Cf. Pindar, *Isthmian* 5.19–20: 'But, with Aiakids absent, my heart can't savour a song!' See also *Isthmian* 6.19–21. The translations are taken from Burnett (2005).
- 11 For the mythological and epic background to Pindar's Aeginetan ideology see Nagy (2011).
- 12 The political implications, and uses, of the Aeacid myth in Pindar's Aeginetan odes are studied from different perspectives in Fearn (2011). For Pindar's relationship with the Aeginetan aristocracy see also Hornblower (2004, 207–35).
- 13 See Morrison (2011) on the question of re-performances on Aegina.
- 14 The chronology of war between Aegina and Athens (Herodotus 6.85–94) is hard to establish. It seems to have consisted of two phases, one in the late 490s and another in the 480s, when Nicodromus attempted a coup, backed by the Athenians. For hostilities between Athens and Aegina see Hornblower (2004, 227–31); Haubold (2007); Kowalzig (2007, 207–13); Irwin (2011b, 445–52).
- 15 For the temple and its sculpture programme see Watson (2011) with further references.
- 16 Athanassaki (2011).
- 17 Herodotus 8.64. The images are mentioned for the first time in 5.78–81, where the Aeginetans loan the Aeacidæ to Thebes for use against Athens. Cf. Fearn (2011, 184–7); Irwin (2011a, 404–5).
- 18 On this ode see Burnett (2005, 57–76).
- 19 Burnett (2005, 67–8).
- 20 This is the central function of the device of the priamel in Pindar's epinician odes. Cf. Stenger (2004, 97–8 with n. 139).

- 21 Again, the precise date cannot be established with certainty. In any case, the ode is later than *Nemean* 5 as it makes reference to Pytheas' earlier victory. This suggests a date just before 480.
- 22 The following discussion of the myth and the ode is necessarily selective. A fuller analysis can be found in Burnett (2005, 77–88) and Indergaard (2011).
- 23 See Burnett (2005, 85).
- 24 Athanassaki (2011, 281–2); Watson (2011, 101–3).
- 25 Pindar, *Isthmian* 6.24–54. Burnett (2005, 83, 86); Indergaard (2011).
- 26 Salamis had become an Athenian possession already in the sixth century. Cf. Solon fr. 1–3 W. and IG I³ 1 (late sixth century).
- 27 The close parallel of *Nemean* 4.46–7 is evidence that this was in fact one of Pindar's communicative aims. There, Telamon's home Salamis is included in the catalogue of Aeginetan territories. The catalogue is, however, a matter of ideology rather than historical claims because the Aeginetans do not seem to have sought control over the places mentioned in it.
- 28 Kurke (1991).
- 29 See Burnett (2005, 89–101) for an analysis of the poem. Stenger (2014) deals with the Aeacid myth in *Isthmian* 5.
- 30 Pindar, *Isthmian* 5.4–5 and, explicitly, 48–50. See Morrison (2011, 230–31) on the question of dating.
- 31 According to Herodotus 8.46, Aegina provided thirty vessels, which is a surprisingly small number. Cf. Irwin (2011a, 421 n. 11; 2011b, 450–51).
- 32 Mackie (2003, 45–6).
- 33 Pindar, *Pythian* 9.104–5 and *Nemean* 1.34. Cf. Mackie (2003, 40 and 51). The parallel between the victories of Lampon's sons and those of the Aeacidae is, as Kurke (1991, 231–2) shows, further enhanced by common economic imagery in lines 17–19 and 26–7.
- 34 Cf. Pindar, *Nemean* 6.55; *Pythian* 8.32.
- 35 Pindar, *Isthmian* 5.48. Cf. *Olympian* 10.78, *Pythian* 4.64–5.
- 36 The catalogue of Theban heroes in *Isthmian* 7.3–15 with the following praise of the laudandus Strepsiades in 16–21 serves a similar function. Cf. Currie (2005, 218–22).
- 37 Currie (2005, 77–81). The mythologisation of figures and events close in time is aptly expressed in [Demosthenes] 60.9. See also Steinbock (2013) on the reconstruction of the past in Classical Athens.
- 38 Pindar, *Isthmian* 5.46–7. For similar remarks see *Olympian* 2.83–91 and 13.93–7.
- 39 Pindar, *Isthmian* 5.17–19 and 54–61. Pindar's reference to his 'new song' (64) suggests a continuance of the series.
- 40 Pindar, *Isthmian* 5.11; 13–16; 52–3; 56–8. Theunissen (2000) explores Pindar's view of the human condition from a philosophical perspective.
- 41 Grethlein (2010, 43–6) has made similar observations on *Olympian* 2.
- 42 Homer, *Iliad* 1.8; Pindar, *Olympian* 10.60. Cf. Mackie (2003, 51–3).
- 43 See Stenger (2004) and Boeke (2007) on *gnomai* as an interpretive tool in epinician songs.
- 44 Pindar uses a similar phrase in *Isthmian* 7.27 with regard to an infantry battle.
- 45 Herodotus makes reference to the competition over whether an Athenian or

Aeginetan ship was responsible for the start of the battle, and, thus, which city deserved the reputation as the actual winner (Herodotus 8.83–4, 122). Cf. Irwin (2011a, 405–6).

46 See further Indergaard (2011) on the political dimension of *Isthmian* 6.

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3 Tragedy and Fictionality

Ian Ruffell

Greek tragedy has played a large role in theories of fiction, but it is a role that is also problematic. It stands at the head of the Western literary-theoretical tradition, and provides the principal material for Plato and, in particular, Aristotle in their respective theorising about *mimesis*. Yet it is not always clear that tragedy can be co-opted to more recent approaches to fictionality. In this paper, I shall be asking how tragedy stands in relation to theories of fiction. Is fictionality a reasonable category to apply to Greek tragedy, above all in its original context? Did the ancient audience approach Greek tragedy as fiction? The broader issues that I shall be teasing out will be what the audience knew, believed or expected in watching a Greek tragedy. As such, I shall also be re-examining the somewhat well-thumbed question of how Greek tragedy related to Greek mythology more generally—and the status and truth claims of that mythology.¹

This paper revisits a number of issues that I have discussed in my work on Greek comedy.² There, the problems that I was addressing were the relationship and co-existence within fiction of possible and impossible characters, entities and events, and the implications of theatrical self-consciousness (metatheatre or metafiction) within a given fictional context and audience relationship. What I rather took for granted and did not question was whether it was legitimate to regard Greek drama as fictional.³ In some ways, the flagrant impossibility of many comic characters, actions and even worlds made it easier to skate over that question. How could you watch fifth- and early fourth-century Greek comedy and *not* regard it as fictional? And as for the *realia*, even if the real-life analogue of Paphlagon in *Knights* was sitting in the front row, the very juxtaposition emphasised that what was on stage was not *real*. The situation with tragedy is far more ambiguous, as its subject matter in most instances could be claimed as in some sense historical, in that the events of the overwhelming majority of Greek tragedies dealt with material set in the far or near past. Yet ‘historical’ is almost as anachronistic a term in relation to fifth-century Greek tragedy as ‘fictional’. It might, for example, be argued that neither term is appropriate for the discourse that was Greek tragedy. I am not going to make that claim. I do want to argue that we should see Greek tragedy as a form of fiction, even if that was

not clearly articulated by the Greeks of the time. If anything the historicity and truth claims of mythological narratives have been overstated.

Approaching Fictionality

I begin by considering the category of fiction, before turning to the fifth-century context in detail. Fictionality has traditionally been seen as deriving from one of three aspects of storytelling: content, form and context. Some of these have a greater claim than others to having a universal, or at least a substantial cross-cultural, application. To take the first, there has often been an equation of fiction with the telling of stories that are not *true*. Certainly, demonstrable falsity is a quality of much fiction, but by no means all. The historical novel is one area where many of the events and characters can be historically true, albeit in most cases co-existing with characters that are invented: Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and Dumas' *The Three Musketeers* are popular examples.

Various theoretical approaches have been taken to dealing with that apparent co-existence of truth and falsehood in historical fiction. At one extreme John Searle proposed that such fiction is a tessellation of 'serious' utterances—that is, truth claims to which the speaker is committed—and 'non-serious' utterances, which are false or to which the speaker is not committed.⁴ This patchwork of referring and non-referring statements, this mix of committed and uncommitted utterance, has not found wide favour. At another extreme, the idea that fictional utterances have sense (can be construed) but not reference (making any kind of truth claims), as Frege proposes, seems a blunt instrument that does not fit with how we talk about fiction. It is perhaps particularly unsatisfactory for historical fiction.⁵

Debates about the content of Greek tragedy, particularly in relation to myth, could be said to be focusing on this aspect of fictionality as falsehood. Questions of how much is invented by the tragic authors frequently equate fictionality with invention or with falsity. Thus, for example, Matthew Wright's major study of the *Helen*, *Andromeda* and *IT* investigates these plays as if their plots were 'counterfactual', which in turn he equates with fictionality.⁶ The question of whether Greeks believed in their myths is also working at the same question: are these and similar works history or are these fiction?⁷

Another approach has been to locate the quality of fictionality in some formal aspect of discourse. The novel again tends to be selected

for this purpose, but while some characteristic modes of expression can be found for some discourses, such as, for example, free indirect discourse, such modes cannot be established on any general basis, whether by period or genre.⁸ In the fifth century BC, the combination of theatre and mask might have been a good indicator that what was being watched was drama, and perhaps dramatic fiction, although neither the theatre nor the mask by itself was any guarantee that an audience was watching drama, and the mask has by now (for us) lost its overwhelming association with theatrical fiction.⁹

A more useful approach, and the one favoured by most recent theorists, has been to see fiction as a kind of speech act, but in a different way to Searle's combination of committed and uncommitted utterances; rather, based on Paul Grice's maxims about everyday speech, fiction can be understood as a mutual agreement and understanding between two parties, to speak and understand an utterance as fictional, and to make-believe fictional propositions on the basis of those utterances.¹⁰ Fictional utterances, on this model, project imaginary (fictional) worlds, to which they refer. We can, then, usefully talk about truth in fiction (with respect to the fictional world or worlds), but not about fictions as true or false with respect to the actual world. We can talk about the relationship between fictional worlds and the real world (however defined), but fictional utterances are not making truth claims about the real world.¹¹ This is not to say, for example, that historical fiction does not *use* details that may belong to the historical part of the audience's knowledge or beliefs, or that an author may not make efforts to create a world that is *historically plausible*, but all the same historical truth in fiction is at best an accident.¹²

How the mutual intentions (to communicate and process as fiction) are signalled and agreed is a somewhat thornier issue, and here in particular one may be looking for a variety of culturally specific factors without any claim to being universally or (by themselves) necessarily indicative of fictionality. Thus theatre, metre and mask may all play a factor in signalling Greek drama as fictional. Demonstrable falsehood may also be one of these contingent signals rather than being the sum total of fictionality.

Even advocates of such a position have had problems with Greek tragedy and similar forms of cultural expression, and it is interesting to see how the first and second approaches to fictionality, as deriving from content or form, persist. Thus Lamarque and Olsen, who view fiction as a developed form of cultural expression, distinguish heroic saga in the Norse tradition from fictionality. Yet they regard the

Homeric epics as fictional, and refer with approval to Auerbach's distinction between the *Odyssey* (and *Iliad*) on the one hand and the Old Testament on the other.¹³ The distinction is partly in the form of the writing—everything (according to Auerbach) is externalised in Homer (particularly characters' motivations), whereas in *Genesis* so much is left unexplained—but also in the relative completeness of their respective worlds and the truth claims around them: Homer does not require commitment to the reality of this world.

One can perfectly well entertain historical doubts on the subject of the Trojan War or of Odysseus' wanderings, and still, when reading Homer, feel precisely the effects he sought to produce; but without believing in Abraham's sacrifice, it is impossible to put the narrative of it to the use for which it was written. Indeed, we must go even further. The Bible's claim to truth is not only far more urgent than Homer's, it is tyrannical—it excludes all other claims. The world of the Scripture stories is not satisfied with claiming to be a historically true reality—it insists that it is the only real world, is destined for autocracy. . . . The Scripture stories do not, like Homer's, court our favor, they do not flatter us that they may please or enchant us—they seek to subject us, and if we refuse to be subjected we are rebels.

Auerbach (1968, 15)

Conversely, they are prepared to go some distance with Kendall Walton, who suggested that the fictionality of the myths of Greek tragedy was culturally contingent: that they were regarded as non-fiction by their original audience but would be regarded as fiction by modern audiences.¹⁴ While this is certainly possible, it is rather inconsistent with Walton's general approach to fictionality, which is that works of fiction are props in games of make-believe, and that they function in this respect like mud-pies, children's toys, clouds in the sky, or any other such props. Walton, certainly (unlike Lamarque and Olson), sees this as no particularly culturally advanced phenomenon (and in this he is rather like Aristotle, as I show below). And yet there is a tension here between the Greeks as naive and credulous on the one hand and poetically sophisticated on the other.

Myths and Fictions

These uses of Greek epic and tragedy by modern critics and theorists raise the question of whether there is any ancient evidence for Greek audiences understanding Greek tragedy as in any sense fictional (in the terms set out above). Given the disagreement among philosophers, it might be unreasonable to expect to find any evidence of fiction understood precisely as Gricean intentions, and so I shall cast the net fairly widely. I start not with what is perhaps the obvious place to

look—Plato, Aristotle and what might be regarded as the philosophical tradition—but with the similarly problematic evidence of Old Comedy. Aristophanes gives us an indication that some, at least, of its original audience could regard Greek tragedy as a form of fiction.

Aristophanes' *Acharnians* and *Thesmophoriazousai* both offer competing visions of tragic fictionality, which span a range of positions, from the content-based model to the pragmatic model that has come to dominate recent studies of fictionality. In *Acharnians*, Dicaeopolis impersonates (badly) a character from Euripidean tragedy, in order to win over the chorus, who are objecting violently to his personal peace treaty with the Spartans. His eventual speech is embedded in an extended engagement with tragedy, both parodic and direct, throughout the play, in which the qualities of tragic *mimesis* are foregrounded.¹⁵ Dicaeopolis visits Euripides to borrow the costume of a character who is both pathetic and articulate. The scene is predicated on the claim (never contested) that Euripides himself acts like his characters in order to write them (410–17)—an absurd extension of the pretence model of fiction. After rattling through a number of Euripides' beggars and cripples, they arrive at the man in question, Telephus. Dicaeopolis wants his rags (431–2) in order to play a complex fictional game with the chorus and audience.

δεῖ γάρ με δόξαι πτωχὸν εἶναι τήμερον,
εἶναι μὲν ὅσπερ εἰμὶ, φαίνεσθαι δὲ μὴ
τοὺς μὲν θεατὰς εἰδέναι μ' ὅς εἰμ' ἐγώ,
τοὺς δ' αὖ χορευτὰς ἡλιθίους παρεστάναι,
ὅπως ἂν αὐτοὺς ῥηματίοις σκιμαλίσω.

For I must be thought to be a beggar today,
to be who I am, but not to seem so:
the audience must know who I am,
but the chorus must stand there like idiots
so I can shaft them with wordlets.

Acharnians 440–44

From the chorus' point of view, the poor shafted chorus, this is a fairly crude statement of dramatic illusion, which can be seen as a form of the pretence approach to fiction. Implicit in this is the falsehood of the

pretence or illusion. This understanding of fictionality, dramatic or otherwise, is well attested at a similar date in the work of Gorgias, who roots the power of storytelling, *logos*, in deception (*apate*).¹⁶ From the audience's perspective, however, we are much closer to the idea of a fictional contract: they *know* that Dicaeopolis is really not Telephus, but accept that he seems to be Telephus. This being comedy, the seeming requires quite a lot of make-believe given the patchy costume and all-too-visible grotesque underpinning, and the eventual speech that Dicaeopolis makes in his Telephus character plays off both the fictional seeming and the fictional truth against the extra-dramatic world too. What is shown in this passage, however, is a recognition that tragedy encourages the idea of a pretence/illusion hypothesis, whereas actually fictionality requires a great deal of complicity.

Given the pathetic nature of Euripides' beggar-heroes, *Acharnians* also has things to say about emotional engagement from both an author's and an audience's perspective, and this question of affect intersects with those of realism and illusion, but it is not my main concern here. Similar ideas are also exploited, if anything more fully, in the prologue of *Thesmophoriazousai*. Like the Euripides of the previous decade,¹⁷ only more so, the tragedian Agathon acts like his characters (130–72);¹⁸ the affective dimension of his impersonation is such that his cross-dressing and his song result in Euripides' relative experiencing a sexual thrill.¹⁹ As with *Acharnians*, this extensive set-up establishes long-running jokes that make play not only with the simple fact that characters are acting tragic in comedy, but also with *how* they are doing so. The part of that play that is of particular relevance here, however, is the later section where the relative has been induced to enter the women's assembly and plead Euripides' case. He is captured and tied up, and Euripides devises various plans to rescue him. In these rescue attempts, Aristophanes sends up the recent rash of escape plays that have been presented by the tragedian, with Euripides and his relative playing various roles between them. Again, the notion of make-believe and 'playing along' is exploited: the relative tries out Palamedes, but fails, and then chooses to imitate Helen, in Euripides' recent version (849–51). This is, explicitly, *mimesis* (850), but again it is hardly illusionistic. Indeed, this is the problem. Kritylla has seen the relative laid bare with the clearest demonstration that he is not, actually, a woman, and his appearance is still in a state of considerable disarray. His attempts to play Helen thus meet with extreme scepticism, even if he does have possession of female clothing (851). When Euripides turns up, playing Menelaus, Kritylla is prepared to accept the playwright in that role, at least to begin with. His insistence, and his relative's insistence, that they are

all playing roles in this new drama, and their attempt to co-opt Kritylla, run up against the stumbling block that she is not prepared to make-believe that the relative is anything other than what he is (896–901). Whereas *Acharnians* shows the practice of fictionality but multiplies it, *Thesmophoriazousai* shows the impossibility of fictionality on a pretence or illusion hypothesis. Any audience member who gave it a second thought in or out of the theatre would know that the actor playing Helen in Euripides' play was actually male, that the playing space was not actually Egypt, and so on.²⁰

These examples do at least show that, by the last quarter of the fifth century, Greek tragedy was being talked about in the public space of the theatre in terms of imitation, (false) appearance, deception, and an interplay between belief and knowledge that approximates, I would argue, to make-believe. Any of these would, I think, qualify to suggest that Greek tragedy was perceived (by this time at least) to be fictional, in our terms.

Yet it still might be the case that Greek tragedy, while a form of dramatic representation, was perceived as making a truth claim about the past. Here again, we may look to the evidence of comedy, although the argument is essentially a negative one. The jokes about Euripides, in particular, in both *Acharnians* and *Thesmophoriazousai*, are not based on the truth or falsehood of his plays, but on his playing with the status of characters, and the repetitive way in which he does it: the endless beggars and cripples. There are jokes on the plots being used in the escape plays, but both repetition and the move to a happy ending are being pointed up, not the truth or falsehood of them. Euripides' *Helen* is admittedly new (*Thesm.* 850), but it is notably not false.²¹ Given the way in which *Helen* problematises notions of belief and knowledge, that may be somewhat surprising, but the comic emphasis is on fictional co-operation (or not) rather than the truth value of the story.

Similar patterns can be seen in Aristophanes' *Frogs*, where the mutual criticism by his versions of Aeschylus and Euripides have very little to say about the truth or falsehood of the tragic stories, but a lot to say about their ethical and political dimensions (as well as aspects of their formal characteristics). Thus the debate over stories such as Phaedra, Stheneboea and the other bad women of Euripidean tragedy is not over their truth or falsehood, but over their prior existence as stories and the effect they have on the audience. Euripides and Aeschylus are agnostic (or do not address the question) as to whether Phaedra existed, but are careful to refer to the pre-existence of the story (*logos*):

Eu.	πότερον δ' οὐκ ὄντα λόγον τοῦτον περὶ τῆς Φαίδρας ξυνέθηκα;
Al.	μὰ Δί', ἀλλ' ὄντ'. ἀλλ' ἀποκρύπτειν χρὴ τὸ πονηρὸν τὸν γε ποιητήν.
Eur.	Was this a non-existent story that I wrote about Phaedra?
Aesch.	No, it existed, but it's the poet's job to cover up what is disgraceful.

Frogs 1052–3

That the concerns of Old Comedy with Greek tragedy focused on anything other than its truth value can also be seen from a slightly sideways perspective in Aristophanes' *Peace*. Here, Trygaeus appears on the flying dung-beetle, preparing to fly to heaven in the style of another of Euripides' beggar-heroes, Bellerophon, who flew up to heaven on Pegasus in order to challenge Zeus about his own serial misfortunes.²² Before departing, he has a conversation with his highly sceptical children. This conversation starts by adding a further overtone of impiety and impending disaster by borrowing from the overheated incest narrative of Euripides' *Aeolus*. The conversation then turns to the relative plausibility of the actions in comedy and tragedy.

Πα.	ἄπιστον εἶπας μῦθον, ὦ πάτερ πάτερ, ὅπως κάκοσμον ζῶον ἦλθεν εἰς θεοὺς.
Τρ.	ἦλθεν κατ' ἔχθραν αἰετοῦ πάλαι ποτέ, ὦ', ἐκκυλίνδων κάντιτιμωρούμενος.
Πα.	οὐκουν ἐχρῆν σε Πηγάσου ζευῆαι πτερόν, ὅπως ἐφαίνου τοῖς θεοῖς τραγικώτερος;
Daughter:	Father, dear father, that's an unbelievable story you've quoted, that a foul-smelling creature came to the gods.
Trygaeus:	One day, long ago, it went there in its feud with the eagle,

and took revenge by rolling its
eggs out of its nest.

Daughter:

Then shouldn't you have yoked
Pegasus for flight,
so you could have appeared more
tragic to the gods?

Peace 131–6

For Trygaeus' daughter, the fable of the eagle and dung-beetle from Aesop's *logoi* is an 'unbelievable story' (*apiston mython*). A more believable (as well as a more appropriate) story would be that of Bellerophon riding up to heaven on Pegasus. Trygaeus' response addresses practicality in typical comic fashion, with an in-flight recycling system—absurd, of course, but addressing an area of practicality not covered by the Bellerophon story. Of course, as matters progress, Trygaeus' flight to heaven is successful: he even manages a return to Earth without the catastrophic consequences that there were for Bellerophon. So much for being an *apiston mython*—and so much, indeed, for the plausibility of tragedy.²³

If Trygaeus' daughter is concerned with plausibility above all and is not particularly committed to the truth value of the stories of Greek tragedy, broadly similar presumptions are the basis of those later witnesses of Greek tragedy, Plato and Aristotle. Of course, both are busily grinding axes, but even so neither is such as to suggest that the mythical stories that are the basis of Greek tragedy, or its precursor epic, are true.

Plato is particularly concerned with truth in dramatic representation and in storytelling, but in almost wholly negative fashion. In *Ion* he assaults the knowledge and expertise of the rhapsode and the poet. In the *Republic* his main target is dramatic representation, although he has much to say about diegetic narratives as well. As far as the mythological stories themselves are concerned, Plato unequivocally states in the *Republic* that the grand narratives of Homer, Hesiod and the rest of the poets are false (*Republic* 377d5–6). With more nuance he adds a little further on that it is difficult to know where truth lies in relation to stories from the past (382d1–2). He also makes a strong distinction between *mythoi* and *logoi* (e.g. *Phaedo* 61b2–7), which is not echoed by Aristotle in the *Poetics*. Aristotle, rather, refers in more neutral terms to 'stories that have been handed down': τοὺς . . . παρειλημμένους μύθους and τοῖς παραδεδομένοις (*Poetics* 1453b23–6) or τῶν παραδεδομένων μύθων (1451b24). While he insists that a tight range of these established stories has become the mainstay of

tragedy, and indeed that one should not ‘do away with’ them (λύειν), he concedes both that there was once a wider range of stories and that there was still scope for outright invention in the late fifth century with Agathon’s *Antheus*.

As far as the truth value of such inherited stories is concerned, Aristotle is somewhat more ambivalent than Plato. His distinction between tragedy and history is on the grounds that one (he argues) does tend to make specific truth claims, while the other makes general and probabilistic claims, i.e. about how people are likely to act in a given circumstance (1451a–b5).²⁴ Indeed, Stephen Halliwell has even argued that, in such passages, Aristotle is formulating a propositional rather than referential view of fictional *mimesis*.²⁵ Nevertheless, Aristotle does insist on the importance of using existing names. The way in which he discusses this verges on suggesting that tragic content might (possibly) have a basis in fact, but he clearly indicates that it is problematic to privilege that aspect; rather historicity is subsumed within the broader set of possibilities. Thus he denies that τὰ γενόμενα (‘things that happened’) are the job of the poet (1451a36–7), but allows that things that have happened are necessarily possible (1451b16–19). Even if the names of the characters are familiar, Aristotle’s tragedians are not committed to the *historical* truth of the stories that they tell about them.

The overwhelming evidence from texts of the fifth and fourth centuries that discuss tragedy is thus that the stories of Greek tragedy can either be presumed to be false or at best only accidentally true—like fiction. Although speculation about storytelling and indeed the category of mythology itself seem to be particular features of fourth-century thinking, such a view of inherited stories in fact echoes comments in earlier poets. The nature of dramatic representation may have encouraged reflection on *mimesis* and its implications, but a concern for the status of the retelling of inherited stories, and indeed the status of those stories themselves, goes back to the beginnings of surviving Greek poetry.

Although the Homeric narrator will invoke the Muses for their authority and knowledge at certain moments in the poem—not least in the introduction of the catalogue of ships (*Iliad* 2.484–93)—Hesiod is rather more explicit that not all the inspiration from the Muses deals with the truth. As he describes his encounter with them on Mt. Helicon, the goddesses claim that they know both ‘how to speak many lies that resemble truth’ (ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα, 27) and the truth itself, *whenever they feel like it* (εὔτ’ ἐθέλωμεν ἀληθέα γηρύσασθαι, 28). For all that Hesiod goes on to claim particular

favour and authority as he receives a staff from the goddesses, this is a far more non-committal way of claiming divine authority than that expressed in Homer: the truth or not is explicitly according to the caprice of the gods.

The flexibility of the mythological tradition and its distance from truth is also evident in Stesichorus' notorious palinode denying that Helen ever went to Troy (fr. 192 *PMG*). Without re-opening the question of the constitution of this poem, I stress here that the three-line snippet quoted by Plato, regardless of whether there was an alternative story being proposed, is a categorical statement of falsehood in the inherited stories.

Later on, Pindar has much to say about the value of poetry in enhancing reputation, but he also has things to say about the truth value of poetry, where he is understandably no less cynical. Famously in *Olympian* 1, he rejects the story of Tantalus cooking his son Pelops and serving him to the gods in favour of an apparently invented relationship with Poseidon modelled on Zeus/Ganymede.²⁶ In *Nemean* 7, he specifically doubts the stories attached to Odysseus (7.20–24) by Homer. The blind poet here stands for the epic cycle more generally, and Pindar gives the example of the story of the arms of Achilles, and Ajax's subsequent suicide as not being consistent with Ajax's martial reputation. Pindar's gambit here is somewhat double edged. The truth of the inherited *logos* is doubted in order to enhance the standing of both the poet and his audience, who are distinguished from the credulous mass of people: 'for the vast mass of men has a heart that is blind' (τυφλὸν δ' ἔχει | ἧτορ δὲ ὄμιλος ἀνδρῶν ὁ πλεῖστος, *Nemean* 7.26–7).²⁷

Similar manoeuvres are undertaken slightly earlier by Xenophanes, who attacks Homer and Hesiod specifically in relation to their representation of the gods (see especially frs. 10–12). He also presents mythical monsters (giants and centaurs) and battles as 'the inventions of our ancestors' (πλάσματα τῶν προτέρων, fr. 1.22). This is not the place to explore how consistent Xenophanes was either in his critique of the inherited stories or in his presentation of an alternative theology,²⁸ but his assault on naive anthropocentrism (frs. 14–16) and acceptance of divine immorality (fr. 11) functions to mark off the poet, at least, from the mass of credulous Greeks. However, a general scepticism about the inherited stories (including Titans) is congruent with but hardly required by an objection to anthropomorphised and individuated gods. Rather, fr. 1 builds from such scepticism to an expression of entirely conventional piety. While Xenophanes' radical propositions might be thought to reinforce a naive audience, in fact he

seems to have envisaged at least varying degrees of commitment on his audience's part to different aspects of the inherited stories.

Perhaps the best evidence for the inherited stories of poetry being *in some sense* historical is their appearance in the programmatic sections of Thucydides and Herodotus, at around the same time that Aristophanes was writing. Neither, in fact, does much to assert a strong truth value for these stories. Herodotus gives competing mythological narratives about the causes of enmity between Greeks and Persians, only to distance his own researches from it in terms of what was knowable (1.5): he will not commit to any claim about the mythological past, but he does know the person responsible for the most recent round of troubles. Meanwhile, Thucydides' account of ancient Greek history uses myth as evidence, except that he clearly regards it as problematic and heavily rationalises it (1.3–4, 8–11), most famously perhaps in his explanation of why and how the Trojan War took the time it did. Thus for Thucydides inherited myth stands in some relationship to the actual events, but not more than the macroscopic events and the most important characters. Even that very limited acceptance of the stories is using rather more relaxed criteria than the very stringent ones he sets out for discovering the truth about contemporary history.

Against such rationalising approaches (themselves sent up in Teiresias' claims about the more implausible elements of the Dionysus myth in Euripides' *Bacchae* 286–97) can be set the undeniable fact that many of the characters from Greek myths, heroes as well as gods, were and continued to be recipients of cult. Such cult suggests that some or most spectators believed in at least some mythical particulars. Attached to such cults (whether local, *polis*-based or Panhellenic) might be a bundle of mythical stories. The plastic representation of such stories in a sanctuary context might readily be thought to be particularly authoritative. It is also undeniable that both the stories and the aetiologies for such cults could be incorporated into Greek tragedy. And yet, as I shall argue in the next section, neither was any guarantee of narrative stability or a consistent and coherent reference world for Greek tragedy.

Overall, then, there is evidence to suppose that, for many and perhaps most of the audience of Greek tragedy, the plays could be regarded as, effectively, fictional, regardless of whether they were supposed to be referring to (or to have been based on) historical characters or events (as we would understand them). Whether in fact those inherited stories were regarded as true by their poets or audiences is more ambiguous. Clearly, the reliability of the stories was

questioned and the capacity for authorial intervention canvassed both before and outside a dramatic context, and from the earliest times. Yet claims to authority and assaults on public credulity speak of an alternative perspective. As I shall go on to argue in the final section, our models of tragic reference (or of how tragedy relates to the actual world) need to accommodate such pluralities of belief among the tragic audience.

Mythical and Fictional Particulars

Before considering the nature of tragic reference, it is necessary to consider what exactly it is to which tragedy might be referring; what, in other words, it is that the audience might have believed in. In particular, if there were elements to the inherited stories that might be considered essential (without any commitment to their having actually happened), then such coherence at least does not conflict with a reference world that is stable and might be regarded as historical (for its audience), although it might equally be stable and ahistorical; inconsistency, by contrast, puts considerable pressure on the truth of that reference world. The evidence that I have considered so far is somewhat equivocal in this respect, but the practical evidence suggests that there were relatively few properties of the handed-down stories that remained stable.

In common with modern studies of fictional reference, particular attention in such comments as we have from the fifth and fourth centuries is given to names. Philosophers of language have discussed the extent to which names act as rigid designators or not, and the extent to which they bring with them essential properties, at least in referring to entities from the actual world. Literary theorists have taken over such concerns with naming.²⁹ Ancient comedians and philosophers likewise focused on the consistency of properties attached to names across worlds.

In a famous passage of Antiphanes' *Poiesis*, from around the middle of the fourth century, a character, perhaps Poetry herself, makes the claim that tragedians have it easy compared with comedians (fr. 189). Comedians have to give the back-story to their characters as soon as they come on stage, or else they are whistled off. Tragedians, by contrast, can just say the word 'Oedipus' and the audience will know everything. Now, as interesting as this is, the passage is somewhat tendentious: on the comic side, it is notable that the comic names are frequently attached to stock characters, who bring their own intertextual baggage. On the tragic side, the question might be raised:

which version of Oedipus would you have in mind?³⁰

Aristotle, writing not much later, was much more ambivalent. As we have seen, at *Poetics* 1451b15–26 he notes and recommends the use of the same narrow range of names and events, as an aid to plausibility, but admits that names and events could be wholly invented. He repeats that the finest tragedy is composed around such families. At 1453b23–37 he makes the rather more nuanced point that it is the relationship between characters that is essential: Clytemnestra killed by Orestes, and so on. Building on this, Aristotle makes the further claim that what can vary in Greek tragedy, then, is not the events but the motivation of characters, and he sets out accordingly a limited typology of motivation, knowledge and responsibility.

Aristotle's argument here might suggest that what matters in Greek tragedy is not the 'what' (which was well known) but the 'how' and the 'why'. That is, what is important in Greek tragedy is not the basic sequence of events, but causation, motivation and the inferences drawn from the way the story is presented in poetic and performative terms.³¹ This is a common enough explanation, and one I have resorted to often enough in discussing Greek tragedy with students,³² but it is an over-simplification: Aristotle's analysis is not so straightforward. Having canvassed the possibility of wholly invented tragedy, Aristotle goes on to make the rather more fundamental and startling point that these traditional stories were not actually well known. It would be absurd, he says, to stick to these stories, because 'even the well-known ones are well-known to few, but all the same they give everyone delight' (καὶ τὰ γνώριμα ὀλίγοις γνώριμά ἐστιν, ἀλλ' ὁμως εὐφραίνει πάντας, 1451b25–6).

Aristotle's claim is slightly uncomfortable reading for anyone interested in exploring what has been termed the 'competence' of the Athenian audience. This is, I think, much more regularly of concern to students of comedy than to those of tragedy, because of the phenomenon of parody, and especially Aristophanes' extensive engagement with Euripides, often with a substantial chronological gap between the parodying and parodied play. At least with comic parody it is possible to make the argument that the audience had a high level of theatrical or performative competence.³³ That performative competence would comprise experience not only of tragedy but also of dithyrambic and rhapsodic competitions as instances of mass spectating in Athens. Whether a wide degree of competence can be assumed outside those areas is more doubtful; a suspicion remains perhaps that the competent spectator is an article of faith rather than anything more substantial.³⁴

If we turn to the evidence of the plays, there is ample evidence to suggest that the ‘what’ of Greek tragedy was as negotiable as the ‘how’ and the ‘why’, even down to the names and characters themselves. If there are essential elements to the story and to relationships between characters, those are again of a very restricted compass. This can be seen even in relation to three of the supposedly well-known families whose characters and stories have been handed down: the families of Agamemnon, Oedipus and Jason.

As far as the latter two are concerned, our extant dramas show clear signs of variability and indeed downright invention, although the latter does admittedly depend upon some arguments from silence. It seems fairly clear that the story of Medea deliberately killing her own children, which now seems so central to the story, was a fifth-century tragic invention. What is not quite so clear is whether it was Euripides who was the innovator. The hypothesis to the play claims (via Dicaearchus) that he was following Neophron, but this has not won universal acceptance: it may be a mistake of sequencing (as happens in the scholia on occasion) or some other error. Either way, both plays seem to have featured other distinct innovations in storyline: Neophron’s play incorporated Jason’s suicide through hanging, while Euripides’ incorporation of Aegeus and the offer of refuge is not elsewhere attested.³⁵

The basic story of Oedipus killing his father and marrying his mother, and its later discovery can be said to be stable, but the identity of the mother certainly does not become stable until the Greek tragedians get their hands on it: earlier she is known as Epicaste (Homer, *Odyssey* 11.271). The stories of what happens to Oedipus and his wife/mother after his blinding are particularly variable: whether he continues to rule, starts another family or is put out to exile.³⁶ In the case of Sophocles’ *Antigone*, unless one accepts the genuineness of the end of Aeschylus’ *Seven Against Thebes*, as few do, there is no obvious sign of Antigone in the stories associated with the *Seven Against Thebes*, or any daughter of that name at all. Indeed, the popular version of the story in Athenian discourse was radically different: there it was the Athenians who compelled the Thebans (either by force of arms or argument) to bury the dead. Clearly this tradition is being drawn upon thematically by Sophocles, but the claims of the family and the sister, which are absolutely integral to the story of his *Antigone*, go with the character. Burian suggests that what we have in Sophocles is a local, non-literary, Theban tradition that has been adapted. There is no obvious sign of this tradition, however, and in any case for an Athenian audience it would certainly qualify as ‘known to few’ (ὀλίγοις γνώριμα).³⁷

As far as the Atreidai are concerned, Matthew Wright has investigated the variability in the versions of stories likely to have been in circulation at the time of *Iphigeneia in Tauris* and *Helen*.³⁸ What is 'essential' in the Iphigeneia story is particularly tricky—her name and even parents are variable; she is either successfully sacrificed or not; if she is not sacrificed then various animals are substituted—but it is generally agreed that she herself ends up in the Black Sea region; she is frequently deified, whether sacrificed or not. With Helen, the dominant narrative is particularly evident, no doubt partly because of Homer, but there is considerable room for negotiation over birth and parents, and in how grotesque a fashion, and over what happens when she leaves Troy. Egypt can be involved both on the way there (with Paris) and the way back (with Menelaus). But there are also variants, apparently Attic in origin, such as Helen snatched by Theseus rather than Paris (Pherecydes) or saved from rape (at the hands of Idas and Lynceus) by Theseus.³⁹ And there is, of course, the denial that she ever went to Troy at all.

Notwithstanding this variability, Wright wants to argue for a broad compatibility in Greek tragedy with the inherited stories. By compatibility, he means that elements from such already rather abstracted skeletons can be omitted or rearranged (as he argues even in *Helen*) while still referring to the 'same' story. He is committed to the idea that myth in some sense both represents history and is foundational to religious belief:

despite the presence of plural, rival versions of myth, the same people believed in the myths and worshipped the gods and heroes on whom they centre. To fifth-century Athenians, myths were not just fairy-stories . . . but they were to a large degree inseparable from history. In addition, they were a source of religious belief, on which contemporary ritual practices were based.

Wright (2005, 71–2)

This begs any number of questions about both history and belief. In terms of the relationship between myth and history, Wright's position is far from atypical: tragic myths are often described as historical. Burian accepts substantial freedom to reinterpret myth but 'not to completely overturn, because it is also history'. Knox, meanwhile, argued that tragedy was 'history for the fifth-century Athenians' but not 'historical fact'.⁴⁰ None is entirely clear about what 'history' might entail in such circumstances,⁴¹ but to a greater or lesser extent (and implicitly or explicitly), these critics are moving towards a relaxation of an association between history and factuality or at least between history and an unambiguous truth claim. I shall return to this in the final section.

The relationship of mythology *in general* to ritual is a large question and one that I cannot cover in its entirety here. That the mythical repertoire was a source for religious belief and ritual practice (or vice versa) has, however, certainly been questioned.⁴² Nor is cult any guarantee of mythical stability or a barrier to innovation. This suggests that belief *in the stories* was rather less important than belief *in an entity*. Even such a fundamental story as the birth of Athena was subject to significant variation.⁴³ By no means every tragedy (or every retelling of myth) had clear connections with ritual or was explicitly aetiological, but where ritual is used by Greek tragedy there is still no guarantee of any narrative stability. I consider this briefly with some further examples from Agamemnon's story.

The basic storyline or story-structure might appear more solid than some of these others that I have mentioned (including that strand related to Iphigeneia). Agamemnon comes home from Troy and is murdered; Orestes comes back from exile in Phocis and retaliates by killing Agamemnon's murderers. So far, so good. This does, however, leave aside the question of who did the dastardly deed on Agamemnon: Aegisthus or Clytemnestra or some combination thereof? All three options are canvassed in the *Odyssey*.⁴⁴ Orestes usually returns from Phocis, although a variant has him in Athens. Orestes as matricide is quite secure, although in Euripides' version, Electra gives more than a little helping hand. What happens next is much more up for grabs. Pursuit by Erinyes and intervention by Apollo comes in at some stage in the tradition (at least by the time of Stesichorus), and the consensus is that somehow, eventually, he ends up on the throne and often with Hermione. In the meantime, his wanderings may take him to Delphi, to the Black Sea or even, as in Aeschylus, to Athens.⁴⁵ It is this arrival in Athens and its aftermath, which takes up the overwhelming bulk of the *Eumenides*, that seems to be the site of flagrant invention by Aeschylus, and co-opting of entirely unrelated cult for an unexpected and highly original double aetiology: for the Areopagus as purely a murder court, and for the incorporation into this of the Erinyes and their identification with the hitherto unsuspecting and unrelated Semnai Theai.

That much even a conservative critic would agree, but there is some doubt whether Orestes had *ever* before Aeschylus been in Athens in his post-matricide flight from Mycenae (or Sparta or Argos).⁴⁶ Later on, there are two strands associating him with Athens, but neither is securely dated before Aeschylus. One has Orestes drinking apart as an explanation for the drinking competition of the Choes (second day of the Anthesteria). Another has him prosecuted by various human or divine agents before a jury on the Areopagus, itself of either human or

divine make-up. Sommerstein has suggested⁴⁷ that the aetiology for the Choes is parasitic on the myth of Orestes' trial, but even if true that does not require any established myth before Aeschylus.⁴⁸ Sommerstein gives much more credence to the idea of a pre-existing story of a trial, but on the flimsiest of grounds. Many of the variant stories are clearly dependent on one or other element of Aeschylus' version; the only details that remain are human accusers (not attested before Hellanicus⁴⁹) and a jury of gods (not attested before Euripides' *Orestes* 1650–52). Sommerstein argues that the human jury is the better aetiology for the Areopagus and so would not have been displaced in a later version by a divine jury.⁵⁰ This argument loses sight of the fact that an aetiology for the Areopagus *specifically as a murder court* looks like it has to be post-Ephialtic, and there are plenty of reasons why a divine aetiology might be preferred to the highly politicised radical democratic settlement that is the basis of the Aeschylean aetiology. Such a displacement would not be out of place given the suspicion of democratic institutions on display elsewhere in Euripides' *Orestes*.⁵¹

Quite similar violence to existing stories can also be seen in *Prometheus Bound*, whether that play is to be regarded as Aeschylean (in some sense) or pastiche-Aeschylean. The substantial back-story that is given by Prometheus to the chorus after they arrive not only omits important parts of the Hesiodic account but emphatically rewrites it. In particular, the genealogy of Prometheus is altered: no longer is he son of Iapetus and Clymene (a daughter of Oceanus, *Theogony* 508), but his mother is now Ge, the Earth, making Prometheus a Titan in his own right. Furthermore, Ge is pointedly identified with Themis, who becomes the source of Prometheus' foreknowledge (*PV* 209–13). Rather than a trickster god encouraging humans to try to outwit the gods, Prometheus has been an ally of Zeus in the war against his fellow Titans, only to pity the humans who are going to be annihilated by Zeus as remnants of the previous regime (*PV* 232–41). Prometheus knows what has the potential to bring Zeus down, and that is the reason why he will ultimately be released. None of this exists in Hesiod or any earlier account, and is essential for the story.⁵² It may well be (as has plausibly been suggested more than once) that the final play in the Prometheus trilogy used as its punchline the festival of the Prometheia. If so, the Aeschylean version can hardly have been what the average Athenian would have hitherto believed in when attending that festival.⁵³

So, in both these cases, the original Athenian audience would have been faced with major elements of the story *and* plot (*and* text) that were unfamiliar and unexpected. It would be overstating it to say that

this was the norm in Greek tragedy—as ever, one must hedge one’s bets because of the number of plays that simply do not survive. What can be said, however, is that there were relatively few essential elements in a version of Greek myth and that the world of myth on which the tragic stories could draw and to which they might (in some sense) refer was hardly stable. This applied even to plays such as the *Oresteia* that drew strongly upon the political and religious life of the *polis*, and which would prove to have powerful resonance. Indeed, the innovations there are particularly pointed.⁵⁴ However else we are to understand tragedy in relation to myth, a truth claim that refers to a stable and coherent historical world cannot be sustained.

Fiction, Myth and Reference

All the same, such a demand may be setting the bar unrealistically high. At this point I return to the theories of fiction that I introduced in the first part of the paper, and in particular those that have employed more relaxed notions of truth, drawn from modal logic and elsewhere. The problem, at least if we are to consider the audience’s processing of a tragedy, may in fact be less with the understanding of myth than with the understanding of *history*, at least as it applies to historical fiction. Indeed, here the very plurality and flexibility of myth may be instructive for historical fiction rather than the other way around.

Clearly, a relatively unmediated form of fictional reference, such as that proposed by Searle, is particularly problematic when the reference world is that of the mythical past. As well as the co-existence of true (referring) and false (non-referring) characters and other fictional particulars, which is there in any historical fiction, the scarcity of stable elements and plurality of versions in Greek myth are additional problems. If, however, the fictional world is ‘closed by implication’, as Doležel and others argue, then fictional propositions govern, and refer to, fictional worlds, so that the immediate problem of making such a decision disappears. Yet audiences, critics and theorists are still interested in relating the fictional (tragic) world to the actual world, whether the world of the audience or the world of the past.⁵⁵ Thus they might be interested in or attracted by the verisimilitude of a historical fiction; or they might be interested in relating the political or ethical deliberations of Greek tragedies to the problems of the audience’s own time (as in much historicist criticism); or in relating the actions of characters in Greek tragedy to what people are likely to do: Aristotle’s probabilistic account again. Even theorists of fictional worlds are interested in assessing their *possibility*

relative to the actual world (whether the world of the audience or the world of the past), or in establishing a typology of fictional worlds (in terms of kinds of truths), to determine how a fictional world is supplemented, or for some other reason.⁵⁶

From that particular theoretical perspective, the problem that, in the case of Greek tragedy, we still cannot talk of a single ‘actual world’ against which the possibility of tragic worlds can be judged, is less significant than it might at first sight appear. One of the criticisms of the use of possible worlds theory by theorists of fiction is their tendency to assume a stable world against which the (incomplete) fictional world can be evaluated. By contrast in modal logic, the accessibility relations between worlds are considered between sets of (complete) possible worlds, which can seem counter-intuitive or clumsy.⁵⁷ For Greek tragedy, however, in considering its relations with the worlds of myth, talking of relations between sets of worlds with Oedipus and Jocasta in them is rather more comfortable than talking sets of worlds with Napoleon or Cardinal Richelieu in them, as one has to do with *War and Peace* or *The Three Musketeers*.

Attempts to deal with (or at least acknowledge) the problem of the single reference world have involved modifications to the concept of the ‘actual world’. Eco, for one, arguing that we can only consider accessibility relations between entities of the same sort, has argued that the actual world is a semiotic construct, based on a ‘cultural encyclopedia’ and not the world of direct experience, and that like fictional worlds it is incomplete.⁵⁸ To take this further, such an encyclopedia encompasses many worlds of knowledge and belief (with varying degrees of commitment). Both myth and history can be located among these multiple and potentially contradictory worlds of belief rather than within a single undifferentiated reference world.

Such a model, drawing on possible-worlds theory, may arguably be assimilated to (or at least productively compared with) attempts to model human cognition. Lakoff and others, who have worked on the development of concepts and categories, have argued that they are *prototypical* in nature, that for a given category (e.g. chair) there is a best example, which acts as a default (e.g. four legs, seat, back), while allowing for a variety of other models, including models that may be widely disparate or mutually incompatible (e.g. armchair [no legs], office chair [adjustable back; wheels] and electric chair). We may also think of myth as prototypical in nature: this would allow for a default, stripped-down version of the *Seven Against Thebes* and the aftermath, which admits of numerous, often incompatible variations.⁵⁹ Both the nature of that best version may vary across time, and the degree of

commitment to its truth may vary within the same broad cultural context.

In these terms, myth in itself can be seen to be rather porous, in that it can be readily updated and altered, and that it presupposes a relatively weak notion of belief or of truth. Leaving aside the problems of fiction, it is quite clear how stories could be told and added to the cultural encyclopedia, even where they conflict with the prototypical version and even where doubts may be expressed over the authenticity of such stories (as in the examples discussed in the first section). Indeed, not only are the stories not guaranteed by cult, but even the cult could be subject to a great deal of manipulation: Theseus being only the most conspicuous example in Athens.⁶⁰ Yet given the weak or uncertain commitment to truth in mythological stories, the development into a more unambiguously fictional mode with no such commitment is straightforward enough, not least given the mimetic nature of dramatic representation (and bearing in mind also that the Athenian stage was not restricted to representations of the past), where any literal truth claims are necessarily problematic. The prototypical and propositional nature of myth also makes clear how tragedy could influence myth and belief, even if it was not making a truth claim. Indeed, it even allows for the tragic version of the myth to become the prototypical version, as Sophocles' version of the Oedipus myth has become for us.

When we talk casually of fiction being 'true', or consider whether Greek tragedy might be considered in some sense 'historical', it would be more accurate to talk of possibility, probability or resemblance than the making or understanding of direct truth claims. This may be much easier to accept in relation to 'myth' than to 'history', but when it comes to the set of audience beliefs, it is straightforward enough to see that they will be both plural and incomplete. The difference between these sorts of beliefs and those in relation to the mythical past will relate to the richness of these beliefs, including those that are stable or essential, to the degree of commitment to the truth of these beliefs (in part dependent on historical distance) and to the criteria for what might be the 'best' version. Those criteria may well be culturally contingent: our own historical beliefs have a strong presumption that the best version is the one that is well documented, but that is by no means true in all circumstances.⁶¹

Thus if one considers our sole surviving Greek tragedy that deals with the recent, 'historical' past, Aeschylus' *Persians*, no one could question the truth of the Persian invasion, of which the audience had direct personal experience—and the ruins of the Acropolis above the

Theatre of Dionysus would have been a stark reminder, were any needed, of those events, less than a decade earlier. In this case, the reference world would be densely populated and the audience would have a very strong commitment to the truth of the events. Yet, although there are many elements of verisimilitude in Aeschylus' play (e.g. in the messenger's report of the fate of the expedition), the play dramatises events at the Persian court that would have been at best unknowable to either audience or poet, and the question of a truth claim is rather beside the point. That does not mean, of course, that probability and verisimilitude would not have been highly valued in the account of the Persian invasion.

Most historical beliefs are not so rich and may lack the same degree of commitment to their truth, while the best version for an audience may depend on something other than whether or not it is well documented. Time and distance are significant factors. Even before today's critical fashion for discussing the construction of 'cultural memory', the malleability of beliefs about even the recent past was well established, going back at least to Herodotus' and Thucydides' demolition of the popular version of the tyrannicides myth.⁶² Their own accounts, too, offer rival versions of the events. For all that Herodotus and Thucydides may be making truth claims in their respective accounts, there are from an audience perspective at least three versions of the tyrannicides' story available by the early fourth century. The 'best' version for the majority of the Athenian public quite clearly continued to be the version rooted in early fifth-century propaganda, even if they were aware of other versions.

If we are to consider an audience's beliefs, knowledge and expectations, then, the approximation between myth and history may best be approached not by asking whether myth was true or not, but by moving historical experience towards myth rather than myth towards historical experience. This is not to deny that strong and direct truth claims can or should be made about the past, although even in historiography these may be problematic (as many of the papers in this volume discuss). Nor is it to deny that there can be interest and pleasure in (the impression of) historical plausibility in fictional works, but it is to claim that these are of extremely limited relevance to Greek tragedy, and that direct truth claims are not the concern of either author or audience.

Conclusion

In this paper, then, I have shown that the modern concepts of fiction

and fictionality are not alien to Greek tragedy in the latter part of the fifth century, and that contemporary audiences and subsequent commentators and critics could see tragedy as a species of fiction. Different concepts of fiction, then as now, were canvassed by Greek writers, from those operating from the point of view of fictional reference—were stories true or false?—to those who had a more imaginative and propositional view of fiction, as a speech act negotiated by two parties. This discussion has necessarily required broader consideration of the status of Greek myth and its creative use and renewal within poetry, which I have only been able to sketch here. Self-reflexive comments by poetic practitioners even before Greek tragedy suggest that the use of mythical content was not constrained by referential concerns, nor indeed does the use of the material in Greek tragedy suggest particular constraints, except perhaps at the most abstracted level.

It would be impossible to deny that many of the figures in these stories were also recipients of cult, but whether the stories of Greek tragedy or anywhere else are making truth claims about such figures is much more debatable. But perhaps, to go back to Auerbach, the very framing of the question is the problem. Perhaps it is not that cult guarantees or mandates belief in stories but that proximity to the divine makes human uncertainty all the more of a concern. After all, as Hesiod notes, the Muses can provide both truth and lies that look like truth. How are we to tell the difference?

Notes

- 1 For belief and mythology, see Veyne (1988). For an overview of approaches to mythology, see Csapo (2005). For Greek tragedy, specifically, there have been a number of recent treatments, especially Burian (1997), Wright (2005, 58–80) and Sommerstein (2010b, 209–23). For an important earlier discussion, see Knox (1979, 3–24). My thanks go to the anonymous referees and Lisa Hau for their helpful and stimulating comments.
- 2 Ruffell (2008; 2011).
- 3 Bierl (1999) doubts that comedy can be regarded in terms of fictionality, because of a persistent ritual dimension, but he regards this as distinct from tragedy.
- 4 Searle (1975).
- 5 For criticism of this position from the point of view of fiction in general, see Doležel (1988; 1989).
- 6 Wright (2005, 59).
- 7 After posing this problem, Veyne resolves it by arguing that the distinction between fiction and reality had not yet been established—a questionable claim, as I argue in the next section—and that myth should be understood instead as ‘literature’, a no less and arguably even more anachronistic concept (1988, 17).

- 8 See especially the remarks of Ronen (1994, 77–81).
- 9 Thus the mask could be used in various non-fictional ritual contexts, albeit often with a strong performative dimension. Although masks in modern times have lost many of their theatrical associations, this does not mean that there are no such connotations today. As for theatres, even at the ‘dramatic festivals’ there was a great deal of non-dramatic activity in the theatre; theatres were also often used for assemblies (even the Theatre of Dionysus on occasion: cf. Ruffell 2011, 272 n. 48). On the mask in Greek tragedy, see especially Wiles (2007).
- 10 See especially Currie (1990); Lamarque and Olsen (1994).
- 11 For possible worlds models, see especially Doležel (1988; 1989), Eco (1981; 1989; 1990; 1994), Ronen (1994). Compare also Lamarque and Olsen (1994) and Walton (1990). It is understandable that many critics would prefer to emphasise the connection between fiction and the real world, and so continue to support the idea of fictional reference, however loosely conceived (see further section ‘Fiction, Myth and Reference’ below). Scepticism about direct truth claims is not, however, the same as denying the possibility of relationships between fiction and reality.
- 12 The novels of Patrick O’Brian set in the naval environment of the early nineteenth century are an excellent example in their author’s use of sailors’ memoirs, naval records and other evidence in order to create a plausible and coherent account of the Royal Navy afloat and ashore—‘what might have happened’, to adapt Aristotle (see below). Yet in this world, not only do invented and historical characters co-exist and interact, there are also real and invented ships (and one real ship, the *Worcester*, from a class not completed until over a decade later and thus described anachronistically: see Lavery 2011) and historical characters in the wrong place at the wrong time, e.g. Admiral James Saumarez in the Baltic in *The Surgeon’s Mate*, as O’Brian himself notes (2011: 10–11). There is nothing formally or contextually within the fiction to distinguish the true from the false within this apparent verisimilitude. Bayley (2011) goes so far as to claim that O’Brian’s interest is not in history *per se*, but that he ‘has contrived to invent a new world, almost entirely . . . a world of enchanting fictional surfaces, and all the better for it’ (2011: 317).
- 13 Auerbach (1968, 3–23).
- 14 See Lamarque and Olsen (1994, 49), citing Walton (1990, 91–2).
- 15 See especially Foley (1988); further bibliography is adduced in Ruffell (2011: 347–52), where my focus is more on tragedy’s claims to realism and parody as part of comic anti-realism.
- 16 Gorgias, fr. 23 D–K; see also his *Encomium of Helen* (fr. 11 D–K).
- 17 Euripides’ reference to behaving like Agathon when he was younger (173–5) may in part be a nod to his earlier representation in Aristophanic comedy.
- 18 The focus is on Agathon’s role-playing of a female character, but in fact one layer of the humour is that he seems to have about him elements of more than one tragic role—the resulting gender incongruity is a source of confusion to Euripides’ relative.
- 19 Zeitlin (1981) is the fundamental study of the presentation of tragedy in the play; for Agathon’s cross-dressing, see especially Muecke (1982).
- 20 See discussion below and more fully in Wright (this volume).
- 21 See some discussion by Wright (2005, 50–54; 2012, ch. 5).
- 22 There is also parody of *Stheneboea*.

- 23 See, further, Ruffell (2011, ch. 8).
- 24 One of the readers of this volume objects that this is a truth claim; but it is a claim about likely human behaviour in general, and not a claim that such-and-such events happened in the past. It is not even a past counterfactual claim of the kind seen in historical fiction of the sort discussed in n. 12: that that is how events would have happened (e.g. if there had been a naval captain called Jack Aubrey).
- 25 Halliwell (2002, 164–7), who also emphasises the absence or near-absence of ψευδ- words in Aristotle.
- 26 See the discussion of Köhnken (1974).
- 27 For negotiation of truth in relation to inherited stories in lyric poetry, see further Stenger (this volume).
- 28 A monotheistic or pantheistic view of the divine seems to be indicated by frs. 23–6, but casual references to a plurality of gods can be seen in other fragments (fr. 1.24, fr. 23.1, fr. 34.2). For discussion and bibliography, see Jaeger (1947, 38–54), Eisenstadt (1974) and Finkelberg (1990).
- 29 See especially the discussion of Ronen (1994, 130–43), with bibliography. Note in particular Eco's discussion of structurally necessary properties in relation to *Oedipus Tyrannus* (1981, 239).
- 30 See, further, Darbo-Peschanski (this volume).
- 31 Thus tragedy would exploit not only the 'text' level (*sjuzet*) but also the causal aspect of 'story' (*fabula*) as opposed to its temporal aspect—'plot' opposed to 'story' in Forster's well-known distinction. For the rehabilitation of plot as a narratological category in relation to tragedy, see Lowe (2000).
- 32 So also, e.g., Burian (1997, 185).
- 33 For one attempt to establish this competence, see Revermann (2006). This competence is doubted by Wright (2012), who envisages Aristophanic parody being appreciated fully only by a select, reading audience.
- 34 Veyne is a notable exception when he argues that only the general outline of the stories was *known* to the audience, considered as a whole (1988, 45).
- 35 For discussion, see Thompson (1944) in support of Neophron; Mastronarde (2002, 44–64).
- 36 Oedipus is still ruling in *Odyssey* 11.275–81; the wife/mother dies in the *Odyssey* but is still living in Euripides' *Phoinissae* and perhaps in Stesichorus. For the second wife, Eurygania, see *Oedipodeia* fr. 2 Davies (Pausanias). For discussion of the identity of the mother in Stesichorus, see Hutchinson (2001, 121) and March (1987, 126–33). For a fuller account of elements of the story that were traditional or invented by Sophocles, see Darbo-Peschanski (this volume).
- 37 Burian (1997, 184 n. 15), although he quotes with approval Kamerbeek's assessment of the originality of the treatment.
- 38 Wright (2005, 67, 69).
- 39 Pherecydes *FGrH* 3 F 153; Hellanicus *FGrH* 4 F 168.
- 40 Burian (1997, 185); Knox (1979, 15).
- 41 Knox further muddies the water by recategorising such mythical history as 'poetry', a manoeuvre similar to Veyne's reclassification of it as 'a very popular literary genre' (1988, 17, see above n. 7).
- 42 A strong connection with religious belief is explicitly denied by Veyne (1988,

- 17). General studies of myth such as those of Kirk (1970) and Csapo (2005) argue against a close or general association between myth and ritual. Lévi-Strauss cautions against a simplistic causal relation, and argues that structural homology between ritual and myth is comparatively rare (1963, 207, 232–41).
- 43 Brown (1952).
- 44 *Odyssey* 1.28–43, 3.303–12, 11.405–34.
- 45 For discussion of the first phases in the story, see Garvie (1986, ix–xxvi); for the later phases, see Sommerstein (1989, 1–6).
- 46 One variant has him in Athens *before* committing the murder: *Odyssey* 3.307.
- 47 Sommerstein (1989, 3–4); with more reservations in Sommerstein (2010a, 144).
- 48 Orestes’ comments at 448–50 could be consistent with the Choes story, but are suggestive of wider social practice (see references collected by Sommerstein on *Eum.* 448).
- 49 Hellanicus *FGrH* 4 F 169.
- 50 Sommerstein (1989, 4–6; 2010a, 144–5).
- 51 Primarily in the narrative of the assembly, 866–956. Willink on *Orestes* 1648–52 suggests that the story of a divine tribunal on the Areopagus was transferred from the trial of Ares for the slaying of Halirrothios (E., *El.* 1258–63).
- 52 See generally Ruffell (2012, 25–56) with bibliography.
- 53 An allusion to the Prometheia is particularly favoured by those who see *Prometheus Pyrphoros* as the final play in a Prometheus trilogy, but might equally have been incorporated in a concluding *Prometheus Lyomenos*: see Griffith (1983, 283 n. 6 and 303).
- 54 For outright anachronism, see Easterling (1985); cf. Sourvinou-Inwood (2003) on ‘zooming’ effects.
- 55 This sort of ‘reference’ to the actual world should be distinguished from the kind of direct reference proposed by Searle. The distinction is not always maintained, even in those who are critical of literary theorists for sloppy terminology: see Ronen (1994, 114–36) for examples.
- 56 For the typology and supplementation, see especially Ryan (1991a, 1980, 1991b).
- 57 See especially Ronen (1994, 47–75).
- 58 Eco (1990, 64–82).
- 59 The assimilation of these two models may be questioned, although Lakoff for one argues that his ‘idealised cognitive models’ are propositional bundles (see especially Lakoff 1987). As such they may govern possible worlds.
- 60 See Plutarch, *Cimon* 8.3–7, cf. Thucydides 1.98.2.
- 61 Thus my own historical beliefs about the Napoleonic Wars are heavily shaped by the novels of Patrick O’Brian, Alexander Kent, Richard Woodman and Bernard Cornwell, and my beliefs about the D-Day landings heavily shaped by *The Longest Day* or *Saving Private Ryan*—even though in some cases I have investigated the historical reality that underpins them.
- 62 See Herodotus 5.55–6, 6.123; Thucydides 1.20, 6.53–9.

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4 Seventeen Types of Ambiguity in Euripides' *Helen*

Matthew Wright

Classical tragedy is regarded as an authoritative medium for the presentation or dissemination of serious ideas. Critics from Aristophanes onwards have treated tragic drama as an influential source of myth, a vehicle for various sorts of teaching, and a repository of Greek ideas about the past and its relationship to the present. Yet many tragedies appear to be subverting received ideas or offering unorthodox accounts of the past. In the hands of the tragedians, myth is not a fixed or monolithic entity, but a fluid and contestable body of material, incorporating many contradictions and alternative versions. It is difficult to say to what extent the tragedians or their audiences believed in the accounts presented on stage; but it seems that tragedy's authority does not depend on any straightforward notion of truth or reliability.

This state of affairs is exemplified particularly well by Euripides' *Helen*, a tragedy in which problems of truth, knowledge and belief are of central importance. This extraordinary play is based on the premise that traditional accounts of the origins of the Trojan War may be wrong. Here we are invited to believe that Helen did not go to Troy, but was spirited away to Egypt in a cloud; that Helen was no scarlet woman but a chaste and faithful wife; that Paris abducted a phantom double of Helen; and that the Trojan War was fought in vain. Thus Euripides' tragedy constitutes an alternative to the version of 'truth' represented by Homeric epic, as well as a provocative response to the mythical tradition more generally. Furthermore, *Helen* can also be read as a challenge to philosophical notions of truth: by undermining the relationship between reality, language and sense-perception, Euripides may seem to be undermining our basis for belief or disbelief in anything at all.¹

But precisely how does this problematic vision of reality emerge? How does Euripides articulate (or imply) ideas of this sort through the words of his characters? These questions have proved difficult to answer. Criticism has tended to centre on the poet's odd 'tone', or on terms such as 'irony', 'self-consciousness', 'detachment' or 'distance';²

but there remains a need for further precision. This essay turns the spotlight on the techniques that Euripides uses in *Helen* to problematise truth and belief, and it makes the specific claim that these problems can be illuminated by applying the methods of practical criticism.

I suggest that Euripides' *Helen* is characterised by a pervasive *ambiguity*—defined as ‘any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language’.³ This definition comes from William Empson's fundamental work *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, which examines the phenomenon of ambiguity in English poetry (especially Shakespeare). Empson's seven types of ambiguity are as follows:

- 1 when a detail is effective in several ways at once;
- 2 when two or more alternative meanings are fully resolved into one;
- 3 when two apparently unconnected meanings are given simultaneously;
- 4 when alternative meanings combine to make clear a complicated state of mind in the author;
- 5 a ‘fortunate confusion’, as when the author is discovering his idea in the act of writing;
- 6 when what is said is contradictory or irrelevant and the reader is forced to invent interpretations;
- 7 full contradiction, marking a division in the author's mind.⁴

Of course these seven types represent only one among many possible schemata according to which ambiguity *could* potentially be described and understood. Indeed, Empson has been widely criticised from a number of angles.⁵ In particular, his insistence that ambiguity is a characteristic of the *best* poetry raises many difficult questions; his seven categories are oddly constructed; his focus on the author's mind, and his belief that the author's psychology or personal opinions are accessible to us, now seems misplaced; his overall case is weakened by his choice of specific illustrative examples (which often seem opaque or misleading); and in general it might be thought that practical criticism of the Empson school has had its day.

Nevertheless, I believe that an Empsonian reading of Euripides can generate some new insights. Clearly there are some problems with Empson's approach, and it would be difficult to apply Empson's seven types of ambiguity directly to Euripides. Even if his categories were unproblematic in themselves, there is the historical angle to be considered, for it may well be that the sort of ambiguity that characterises English poetry and drama is qualitatively different from the ambiguity of Greek tragedy.⁶ Empson, then, is being treated here as a suggestive starting-point rather than a model to be imitated in so many words.

In what follows I identify and explore the effects of *seventeen* types of ambiguity in *Helen*. I should say at once that I make no claim to scientific rigour or comprehensiveness.⁷ Some of my types are no doubt contestable. Not all the types are directly comparable in nature: some are features of form, others of content; some are varieties of linguistic ambiguity, others of poetic ambiguity.⁸ There is a certain degree of overlap between different types that are not mutually exclusive (nor are they exclusively Euripidean). My readers may be able to detect many more or fewer types than I can, or may be inclined to describe them in rather different terms—especially if they are approaching the matter from a different theoretical perspective from my own. The attempt to classify the phenomenon is essentially a way of being more explicit and more transparent, while acknowledging that this is only a provisional, tentative undertaking.

The discussion moves progressively outwards from microscopic to macroscopic effects: it begins with relatively small-scale examples of ways in which Euripides exploits linguistic ambiguity and plays with the meaning of specific words and phrases, and it moves on to broader conceptual ambiguities where issues of truth, belief and coherence are most strongly at stake. These different types vary in complexity and significance, but collectively they add up to a compelling picture of a writer for whom plurality and dissonance are of central importance. I am not suggesting that ambiguity should be regarded as the final destination of analysis. What I am suggesting is that it can offer a fresh perspective on the matters of truth, belief and coherence with which this volume is concerned. But more generally it seems that a rigorous approach to terminology, and an explicit interest in poetic technique (as such), can help one to think and write about Euripides' work with greater clarity and nuance, whatever one's own critical preoccupations may be.

What sort of poet is Euripides? What sort of view of the world emerges from his plays? How does he conceptualise the past, and

what is his attitude to myth and truth? Every reader will have his or her own answers to these questions. My own view is that Euripides, especially in *Helen* but also elsewhere throughout his work, is using ambiguity to create an unsettling view of myth, language and reality. It can seem as if Euripides is opening up the possibility of alternative truths, or even alternative worlds; or perhaps he is more drastically denying the possibility of ever knowing the truth about anything. Even on a less extreme reading it can be seen that Euripides is a poet who is interested in the creative and hermeneutic possibilities of the ‘open’ text (in Umberto Eco’s sense of the word, in which ‘the form of the work of art gains its aesthetic validity precisely in proportion to the number of different perspectives from which it can be viewed and understood’⁹).

1. Structural Wordplay

Early on in *Helen* Euripides establishes a structural dichotomy between reality and illusion that is thematically and intellectually at the heart of the plot. This dichotomy is articulated through a series of recurrent verbal contrasts. Words representing reality—εἶναι (‘be’), σῶμα (‘body’), ἔργον (‘fact’/‘deed’), πράγμα (‘thing’), etc.—are paired off against words representing illusion—δοκεῖν (‘seem’), ὄνομα (‘name’/‘word’), λόγος (‘word’/‘story’), ὄψις (‘appearance’) etc. For instance:

δοκεῖ μ' ἔχειν,
κενὴν δόκησιν, οὐκ ἔχων

It seems to him that he possesses me,
but it is an empty seeming, for he does not

Helen 35–6

προυτέθην ἐγὼ μὲν οὔ,
τὸ δ' ὄνομα τοῦμον

It was not I myself
but my name that was offered as a prize

Helen 43–4

ὥς, εἰ καθ' Ἑλλάδ' ὄνομα δυσκλεῆς φέρω,
μή μοι τὸ σῶμά γ' ἐνθάδ' αἰσχύνῃν ὀφλῃ

Even if I have a bad name throughout Greece,
at least my body will avoid disgrace here

Helen 66–7

τίνα τὸ πρᾶγμ' ἔχει λόγον;

What explanation does this matter have?

Helen 473

It has long been recognised that this binary or antithetical method of organising thought is characteristic of the sophistic movement in general, and that the rejection of language as a representation of reality is a feature of the theories of Gorgias and Protagoras in particular.¹⁰ It is also clear that one of the consequences of a theory that divorces words from reality is that ambiguity comes to seem an almost inevitable feature of language use.¹¹

Nevertheless, there is also another level of significance arising from the fact that the neat structural dichotomy itself breaks down during the course of the play. For instance, when Helen says τοῖς πράγμασιν τέθνηκα, τοῖς δ' ἔργοισιν οὐ (286), she places two ‘reality’ words in opposition to one another. (How to translate this baffling line?—‘In reality I am dead, but in reality I am not’?) Similarly, when Teucer compares Helen with her phantom double (160–61), he is made to say that she has the same σῶμα (‘body’) but different φρένες (‘wits’): that is, the normal contrast between σῶμα (real) and ὄνομα (illusory) is transformed, confusingly, into σῶμα (illusory) *versus* φρένες (real or deceptive as it might be). Compare also the following statement, made by Helen at 297–8:

ἀλλ' ὅταν πόσις πικρὸς

ξυνῇι γυναικί, καὶ τὸ σῶμ' ἐστὶν πικρόν.

When a wife finds her husband's company unpleasant,

the body itself is unpleasant.

In a different context one might read such words as a gnomic comment on sex, marital relations and gender status, but because the preceding scenes have already problematised the word σῶμα, the reader of *Helen* has been conditioned through cumulative repetition [2, below] to interpret this statement as ambiguous. In this context it assumes an additional meaning related to the reality-*versus*-illusion

theme. Helen's physical body (σῶμα) has been presented to us as her *real* identity, as opposed to her name (ὄνομα) or the phantom (cf. 32–4, 43–4). But now she seems to be rejecting her σῶμα (as also at 262–6, where Helen wishes that she could have had a different bodily appearance). All of this makes us wonder what actually constitutes personal identity—and who is Helen?

2. Repeated Words and *Leitwörter*

A cumulative sense of ambiguity can be created through the repetition of key words in different senses. Certain words may recur within a play or scene, or just within a few lines, and through repetition they seem to acquire extra layers of meaning, nuance or complexity.¹²

One of the central preoccupations of *Helen* is marriage and sexual relationships. In particular, our attention is drawn to Helen's relationships with Menelaus and Paris, but broader questions about marriage, fidelity and sexual morality are also raised throughout the play. In this respect, it is interesting to consider the following lines (689–90), in which Helen responds to Menelaus' inquiry about their daughter Hermione's life:

ἄγαμος ἄτεκνος, ὧ πόσι, καταστένει

γάμον ἄγαμον <ἐμόν>

O my husband! Our daughter, childless and *agamos*, bewails

<my> marriage which is *agamos*.

The key word here is ἄγαμος, an inherently ambiguous adjective. First of all it is applied to Hermione, who is 'unmarried', but immediately afterwards it is used to describe Helen's own marriage 'which is no marriage'. Neither of these meanings by itself would normally seem remarkable, but the fact that the adjective is used in two quite distinct senses *in two adjacent lines* makes us perceive it differently: the juxtaposition makes it seem a difficult or marked word somehow.

Perhaps there are actually not two but three different meanings contained in these lines, since that second phrase above, γάμον ἄγαμον <ἐμόν>, is already inherently ambiguous. It belongs to a type of expression that is fairly common in tragedy, whereby a positive term is immediately negated, suggesting a sense of paradox [3, below].¹³ When Helen says 'my marriage-that-is-no-marriage', we take her to mean either that her marriage was not a real marriage, or that it was so terrible or unsatisfactory as to negate the very concept

of marriage.¹⁴ But which ‘marriage’ is she talking about? Is it her relationship with Menelaus, which was ruined by her (apparent) infidelity, or her adulterous liaison with Paris, which only resembled a marriage?¹⁵ Is Helen talking about her own behaviour or that of her phantom double? Or is she looking ahead to another awful union, the marriage into which she fears that King Theoclymenus will force her (cf. *Hel.* 62–3)? It is impossible to answer these questions for certain, but Euripides implicitly poses them—and incidentally underlines the theme of marriage more generally—by his odd use of the repeated word.

Certain words are repeated with extraordinary frequency, to such an extent that they seem to signal a major theme or running motif. One might call such words *Leitwörter*, following the practice of Martin Buber, who coined the term in relation to the Hebrew Bible (though it can usefully be applied to other types of text).¹⁶ Buber defined a *Leitwort*—the literary equivalent of the *Leitmotiv* in music—as ‘a word or word root that is meaningfully repeated within a text or sequence of texts or complex of texts; those who attend to these repetitions will find a meaning of the text revealed or clarified, or at any rate made more emphatic Such measured repetition . . . is probably the strongest of all techniques for making a meaning available without articulating it explicitly’.¹⁷ According to Buber, the most significant function of *Leitwörter* within the Old Testament is that they bestow a degree of unity, or an implicit sort of narrative coherence, on passages or books that might seem incoherent or incomprehensible. Nevertheless, Euripidean tragedy represents a very different type of text from the Bible, and in fact the function of *Leitwörter* in Euripides appears to be almost the opposite of that which Buber detected in the Old Testament. Euripidean *Leitwörter* do convey emphasis, and it may be that they also bring about a sort of structural or thematic coherence in certain plays. But that is not the same as saying that the identification or study of *Leitwörter* will bring clarity. In fact, Euripides often appears to be using these words to make things more, not less, difficult for his interpreters; and it is this difficult or ambiguous quality that marks his work out as especially interesting. Euripidean *Leitwörter* tend to cause special problems for translators: they often elude straightforward definition, either because they are intrinsically ambivalent or because their meaning is being deliberately changed or challenged by the poet in different situations and contexts.

In *Helen* a number of words could be seen as *Leitwörter*, including τύχη (‘chance’, ‘fortune’, ‘circumstance’, ‘luck’, or similar) and its cognates, as well as the pairing of δοκεῖν and εἶναι, λόγος and ἔργον, and so on [1, above]. But perhaps the most interesting is σοφία,

which occurs eight times in the course of the play.¹⁸ In everyday usage the word is already ambiguous, in that it can be used positively (denoting ‘wisdom’ or ‘intelligence’) or negatively (denoting a shallow or suspect form of mere ‘cleverness’). In Euripidean usage it is normally impossible to tell what sense is intended, but the very frequency of its occurrence marks it out as somehow special and draws it to our attention.

Sometimes the meaning is obviously ironical, as when Helen tells Menelaus to pay attention to her, ‘if a woman can say anything *sophon*’ (ἀκουσον, ἦν τι καὶ γυνὴ λέξει σοφόν, 1049)—for no one can fail to see that Helen is infinitely more intelligent than her husband. Helen’s comment reworks a standard misogynistic *topos* of Greek poetry whereby excessively clever women are seen by men as potentially dangerous;¹⁹ by contrast, feminine σοφία is presented here in terms of practical intelligence and common sense. One also suspects the presence of irony when the gods are described as σοφοί just at those points where their behaviour or morality is in question—as when Menelaus describes what burial practices ought to look like, ‘if the gods are *sophoi*’ (εἰ γάρ εἰσιν οἱ θεοὶ σοφοί, 851), or when he prays to Zeus to look favourably on him, ὦ Ζεῦ, πατήρ τε καὶ σοφὸς κλήϊζι θεός (‘Zeus, you are called father and a *sophos* deity’, 1441). Zeus may be *called* wise (or clever), but is he? The events of the play may make us think otherwise.

Other occurrences of the word are harder to interpret. Sometimes an apparently innocuous or unremarkable statement is transformed into something more difficult by the addition of σοφός. What exactly does Theoclymenus mean when he says that the Pelopidae are σοφοί in the matter of funeral customs (1242), and how does he know, anyway? This small, seemingly unimportant detail strikes one as incongruous and difficult to explain. Similarly, it is hard to see exactly why Helen, when performing a lament, is described as σοφώταθ’ ἄβρὸν πόδα τιθεῖσθ’ (‘placing her delicate foot in a very *sophos* manner’, 1528); or why Helen should answer Menelaus’ question about Theoclymenus’ supposed invincibility with the odd statement τὸ τολμᾶν δ’ ἀδύνατ’ ἀνδρὸς οὐ σοφοῦ (‘A *sophos* man does not venture the impossible’, 811). Does it make any difference whether one translates the word as ‘wise’, ‘clever’, ‘knowledgeable’ or ‘sensible’? The fact that this line constitutes a *non sequitur* after 810 (οὕτω σιδήρῳ τρωτὸν οὐκ ἔχει δέμας—‘is his body impermeable to weaponry?’) makes it even harder to decide.

In these and other passages the repeated word seems to mean something subtly different each time, as well as being difficult or

impossible to translate. The level of difficulty is increased when one realises that σοφία seems to be a word of special significance to the poet, not just in *Helen* but in many other plays: it recurs like a sort of refrain or running motif throughout his work.²⁰ Because the word functions intertextually as well as intratextually, its meaning—and its ambiguity—depends in part on the reader’s previous knowledge of other Euripidean plays. Nor was Euripides the only person to use this vocabulary. We also have to consider other social contexts in which σοφία was being talked about, and it is important to avoid taking the concept of ‘intertextuality’ in a narrowly *textual* sense when trying to assess the resonance of words.

3. Paradox

Paradoxical expressions can take various forms.²¹ Distinct or opposite meanings are sometimes treated as if they were synonymous, or combined into a single concept or phrase (corresponding to Empson’s category of ‘two or more alternative meanings fully resolved into one’) —as when Menelaus’ servant describes himself as ‘a noble slave’ (ἐν τοῖσι γενναίοισιν ἡριθμημένος | δούλοισι, 729–30; cf. 1640–41); or when another servant talks of ‘a fine act of treachery’ (καλήν γε προδοσίαν, 1632); or when Menelaus says that his and Helen’s dead bodies will constitute an ‘immortal source of sorrow’ to Theonoe (ἀθάνατον ἄλγος, 986–7); or when Helen says that she and Menelaus have been reunited by a power that is simultaneously both good and evil (τὸ κακὸν δ’ ἀγαθὸν, 643: a ‘fortunate misfortune’, in Kovacs’ translation). Conversely, one also sees phrases in which apparently synonymous or identical things are treated as non-identical, or in which certain qualities or attributes are simultaneously granted and denied—as when Helen is referred to as ‘a prize that is no prize’ (γέρας οὐ γέρας, 1134); or when Helen complains that her κάλλος (‘beauty’) is not καλὸν (‘beautiful’ or ‘fine’: 27; cf. 952–3); or when it is said that the Dioscuri are ‘both dead and not dead’ (τεθνῶσι καὶ τεθνῶσι, 138).

All these formulations are ambiguous in the sense that they make one question the meaning of words in relation to the people or things that they supposedly describe. This type of ambiguity may well lead us to doubt whether truth or identity are single, stable entities of a sort that could ever be described through the medium of language.²²

Another sort of paradox is seen in certain verses in which it seems that the poet’s desire to create a witty or stylish effect, or a sense of epigrammatic quotability, has taken priority over meaning. Self-

conscious elegance and verbal dazzle are the qualities on show, and such lines sound impressive, but the literal meaning is ambiguous or obscure. Empson identified this phenomenon as a characteristic of English writers such as Max Beerbohm and Oscar Wilde (whom he described as a ‘cult of vagueness’).²³ Among Greek authors the same quality is associated particularly with the sophist Gorgias, who (in his *Encomium of Helen* and *On What is Not*) suggested that words do not need to *mean* anything: they have a special, autonomous quality of their own (which Gorgias calls κόσμος, another untranslatable word), and they exert a powerful, mysterious effect on the listener, regardless of their actual content.²⁴ Gorgias’ influence is seen above all in the remains of the tragedian Agathon, who was famous for his aculeate style and also for a certain lack of substance—as in lines such as these, which are impossible to translate into normal English:²⁵

τὸ μὲν πάρεργον ἔργον ὥς ποιούμεθα,

τὸ δ’ ἔργον ὥς πάρεργον ἐκπονούμεθα.

We treat the subsidiary task (*parergon*) as if it were the main task (*ergon*), and we labour away at the main task (*ergon*) as if it were the subsidiary task (*parergon*).

Agathon fr. 11 *TrGF*

There is nothing quite like this in Euripides, but a number of passages and phrases are characterised by a marked verbal dazzle and antithetical shape:²⁶

Xo.	πολλὰ ἂν λέγοιτο καὶ διὰ ψευδῶν σαφῆ.
-----	--

Ελ.	καὶ τοῦμπαλὶν γε τῶνδ’ ἀληθείας ἔπι.
-----	---

Chorus:	Many clear things could be expressed through lies.
---------	---

Helen:	And indeed, also, conversely, many clear things are true.
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Helen 309–10

These lines demonstrate a nice sense of symmetry and also a certain aphoristic quotability;²⁷ but what is actually being stated here? A literal English translation cannot altogether capture the shape or sense. What makes the lines particularly difficult is that the terms σαφής and ἀληθής, usually treated as virtual synonyms (= ‘true’) in normal usage, here seem to be entirely distinct terms.²⁸ And if ‘clarity’

(σαφήνεια) might equally be a property of truth or falsehood, how is it to be defined or recognised at all? Are these lines themselves ‘clear’, ‘true’ or ‘false’? Euripides makes it impossible for us to decide. In fact, there is something paradoxical and unsettling about the way in which the chorus formulate their advice about the untrustworthiness of τὰ σαφῆ in the form of a maxim [7, below] (which might itself be thought of as a λόγος σαφής). Logically it is hard to determine the truth value of such a statement.

4. Vague Use of Periphrasis

Periphrasis is a common mode of expression, frequently encountered in tragedy (in such expressions as ὦ κοινὸν αὐτάδελφον Ἰσμήνης κάρᾳ),²⁹ famously parodied by Housman (‘O suitably-attired-in-leather-boots/Head of a traveller’),³⁰ and not by any means intrinsically ambiguous. Nevertheless, periphrastic formulae may be used to create an interesting sort of vagueness, as in the following lines, spoken by Teucer when he enters the stage and catches sight of Helen:

ὦ θεοί, τίς εἶδον ὄψιν; ἐχθίστης ὁρῶ

γυναικὸς εἰκὼ φόνιον

Oh gods! What have I just seen? I am seeing

the murderous image of a woman

Helen 72–3

The periphrastic expression γυναικὸς εἰκὼ would not normally seem remarkable: in any other context it would probably mean no more than γυνή (‘woman’). But in this context it subtly emphasises a major theme of the play, viz. the confusing and unresolved relationship between the real Helen and her phantom double. The scene that is being played out here is formally a recognition scene but actually ‘a sort of botched *non*-recognition-scene’, given that the two Helens, the flesh-and-blood one and the phantom, are completely indistinguishable, rendering a true assessment of identity impossible.³¹ Thus when Teucer says that he sees an *image* of a woman, we might well interpret the expression literally. The mode of expression leaves it unclear what Teucer *thinks* he is saying; nor is it possible, either for Teucer or the audience, to decide whether the woman in front of him is genuine or a figment of the imagination.³²

5. Abstractitis

An additional and distinct variety of periphrasis is the use of nouns instead of verbs to suppress or obscure the question of agency:

καὶ γὰρ τίσις τῶνδ' ἐστὶ τοῖς τε νετέροις

καὶ τοῖς ἄνωθεν πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις

Helen 1013–14

In these lines the prophetess Theonoe hints at the prospect of posthumous punishment or reward for one's behaviour in life, and also, more specifically, at the concept of astral eschatology (whereby the soul is seen as originating from the stars and returning thence after death).³³ These verses have been found puzzling, incongruous or irrelevant, to the extent that several editors have deleted them.³⁴ Whether or not we can discern a thematic connection between the *content* of the lines and the plot, the point to be made here is that the *form* of expression is ambiguous. Euripides has phrased the words in such a way that it is unclear what is going on. Who is punishing or rewarding whom, and in return for what?

‘There is a repayment for these [things? people?] in the case of all people, both those above and those below . . .’ (as a literal translation might run) is an example of what Fowler’s *Modern English Usage* disparagingly refers to as ‘abstractitis’, a form of ambiguous phrasing ‘with an abstract word always in command as the subject of a sentence. Persons and what they do, things and what is done to them, are put in the background, and we can only peer at them through a glass darkly’.³⁵ Fowler regarded abstractitis as a failing that the best writers would do well to avoid, but it might equally be seen as a deliberate rhetorical strategy to create ambiguity.

A particularly important use of this strategy in *Helen* involves the abstract neuter plural noun κακά, which can refer to any sort of evil or unpleasantness, either actively inflicted or passively suffered.³⁶ This word recurs in connection with the Trojan War and, in particular, with the unanswered question of Helen’s moral character and guilt or innocence. What sort of a person is Helen, and how far was she responsible for the troubles that are attributed to her? Is Helen herself a victim more than a cause of suffering? Is there a morally evaluative sense to κακά? Who was actually responsible for the Greeks’ and Trojans’ sufferings? What happened before the outbreak of war, and who did what? Euripides makes it impossible for us to answer such questions, and this uncertainty is one of the main things that gives the

play its unusually unsettling quality.

The ambiguous use of κακά is first seen in the chorus' question to Helen:

τί γὰρ ἄπεστί σοι κακῶν;

τί δ' ἀνὰ βίον οὐκ ἔτλας;

Helen 217–18

The grammar, though unexceptional, works to obscure the meaning: the use of the genitive plural κακῶν and the dative singular σοι make it unclear whether Helen was the *causer* or the *sufferer* of these troubles. Thus the Greek is hard to render literally into good English. One could translate the phrase, 'what trouble is not yours?' (following Kovacs' Loeb edition), thus maintaining the ambiguity. But it could mean, 'what trouble have you not had to suffer?', or 'what sort of evil is absent from your life (or character)?' The line that follows is similarly ambiguous, since ἔτλας can mean either 'you had to endure' or 'you ventured to do'.³⁷ And perhaps we are also meant to hear an echo [15, below] of Aeschylus' memorable but ambiguous description of Helen leaving for Troy with Paris, ἄτλητα τλᾶσα ('venturing the unventurable' (?), 'enduring the unendurable' (?): Ag. 408), where, despite the translation difficulty, it is at least clear that Helen was the guilty party.

6. Euphemism

An extremely common euphemism or *double entendre* in Greek usage involves the use of words for 'bed' (λέχος, εὐνή, λέκτρα) to stand for any aspect of sexual relations, love or marriage. This sort of euphemism would not normally strike one as ambiguous in a strict sense, since the actual meaning tends to be obvious. Nevertheless, Euripides complicates matters in *Helen* by employing euphemistic expressions in a shifting and paradoxical way when alluding to Helen's love life. This is seen in the following dialogue between Helen and Menelaus (793–6), where Menelaus is trying to discover exactly what happened between his wife and Paris:

Ελ.	πάντ' οἶσθ' ἄρ', ὥς ἔοικας, ἀμφ' ἐμῶν γάμων.
Με.	οἶδ'· εἰ δὲ λέκτρα διέφυγες, τόδ' οὐκ ἔχω.
Εκ.	ἄθικτον εὐνήν ἴσθι σοι

Με.	σεσωμένην. τίς τοῦδε πειθώ; φίλα γάρ, εἰ σαφῆ λέγεις.
Helen:	So you know everything, so it seems, about my <i>gamoî</i> .
Menelaus:	I do. But whether you shunned <i>lektra</i> —that I do not know.
Helen:	Be assured that for your sake I preserved an untouched <i>eunê</i> .
Menelaus:	But what proof do I have of this? This is good news, if what you are telling me is <i>saphê</i> .

The commentators politely evade the central question at issue: that is, are the characters talking about marriage or sex? The highlighted words could bear either interpretation. Elucidation is not to be found elsewhere in the play, where other similarly evasive phrases and vague formulations are used to describe Helen's marriage and elopement or abduction (e.g. 43–4, 66–7, 297–8, 583–4, 689–91, 783), alongside several provocatively suggestive evocations of virginity or parthenic ritual.³⁸ Compare Helen's description of how Hera substituted a phantom in her place:

ἐξηνέμωσε τᾶμ' Ἀλεξάνδρῳι λέχῃ,
 δίδωσι δ' οὐκ ἔμ' ἄλλ' ὁμοιώσας ἔμοι
 εἶδωλον ἔμπνουσιν
 she turned to air my *lechê* with Paris,
 and she gave him not me but a living,
 breathing phantom resembling me

Helen 32–4

It is never made clear whether or not Helen and Paris had sexual intercourse, and this is evidently a source of terrible anxiety for Menelaus. At what stage did the miraculous substitution take place? What do the lines just quoted actually mean? Did Paris have sex with the phantom (who is described as ἔμπνουσιν, suggesting a flesh-and-blood solidity) or with Helen herself? To what extent does the real Helen differ in identity from the phantom? The play's preoccupation with marriage, chastity and fidelity means that these questions are bound to occur to the reader, but Euripides leaves the answers

unclear. Helen's choice of words at 793–6 looks like a deliberate attempt to evade these questions by using a variety of euphemisms that may or may not be exactly synonymous. Menelaus remains unconvinced of her fidelity (as well he might); and his pointed use of *σαφῆ*, 'plausible' or 'sincere' rather than 'true' [8, below], adds a further level of nuance and uncertainty to this crucial exchange.

7. Maxims

Tragedy is full of maxims (*gnomai*), which embody an inherent quality of doubleness or ambiguity.³⁹ In part this is because they are susceptible to being read both in and out of context, in the form of detachable, self-contained utterances that might take on a life of their own independent of the larger text of which they form a part. It is remarkable that maxims account for the vast majority of tragic quotations by other ancient writers, and Euripides would have been well aware that his work would be treated by readers as (*inter alia*) a source of decontextualised gobbets of wisdom.⁴⁰ Indeed, one could even say that tragic maxims are deliberately designed as quotations in the first place: they are often positioned or framed within the text in such a way that they stand out, and they possess a certain epigrammatic, lapidary quality that has been called 'quotationality'.⁴¹ Another reason for regarding maxims as inherently ambiguous is that in terms of their form and content they seem to blur the narratological category of voice. Maxims present themselves as authoritative statements about the nature of the world or as general advice for life. But *whose* voice or thoughts are embodied in a maxim? Is it the character who utters the words, or the author, or a disembodied voice of wisdom? Do the maxims really possess a privileged interpretative status in comparison with the other parts of the text? Euripides makes it impossible to answer these questions, but by including more maxims than any other writer he seems to have a particular interest in exploring the possibilities (and problems) of the *gnome* as a medium of expression.

The maxim uttered by Menelaus at *Helen* 513–14 illustrates many of these qualities:

λόγος γάρ ἐστιν οὐκ ἐμός, σοφῶν δέ του

δεινῆς ἀνάγκης οὐδὲν ἰσχύειν πλεόν.⁴²

There is a saying—not my own, but the words of some *sophos* person—

that there is no stronger power than dread necessity.

First of all, the fact that these lines come right at the end of a scene, immediately before a choral song, gives them a particular emphasis. The deliberate positioning of *gnomai* at climactic points or cadences within the dramatic structure is one of the most typical ways in which tragedians make such lines stand out, and it is a highly suggestive technique in terms of the overall meaning and significance of such lines.⁴³ In addition, this maxim is introduced by another framing device that explicitly identifies it as a *logos* ('saying' or 'maxim') and also distances the *logos* from the speaker himself, attributing it instead to some 'wise' or 'clever' person.⁴⁴ Even within the context of the play, the verse is *already* a quotation (in a literal sense); Menelaus is merely passing it on. Indeed, Menelaus is particularly given to quoting maxims (cf. 417–19, 811, 851–4, 950–51, 1277), but he is also characterised as a rather dull-witted man. Are we perhaps meant to perceive an ironical inconsistency between his character and the apparent wisdom of his maxims? Is the content of this particular maxim to be seen as profound or platitudinous? It is up to the individual reader to decide; but one notes, in addition, that the sentiment being expressed is not self-evidently true. It categorically states that there is no force stronger than necessity—a fact that the rest of the play, with its complicated presentation of supernatural powers, leaves open to doubt.

Another maxim stands out because of its prominent positioning at the conclusion of the messenger speech (1617–18): σῶφρονος δ' ἀπιστίας | οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδὲν χρησιμώτερον βροτοῖς. As before, the voice of the maxim is not necessarily identical to that of the speaker. The messenger is an anonymous Egyptian slave, but he also functions here as an authoritative, quasi-omniscient voice of wisdom and experience. He seems to look down on the whole human race from an almost superhuman perspective and distance: this is suggested here, as very often in maxims, by the word βροτοί ('mortals').⁴⁵ As in the previous example, the subject matter of this maxim suggests a further level of ambiguity, for it tells us that 'there is no more useful advice for mortals than to be sensible and disbelieve'. This sentiment creates a degree of logical difficulty or paradox [3, above]. Can one believe a maxim that encourages disbelief? Is it possible to have an authoritative, definite statement about the *lack* of certainty in human affairs? Surely maxims depend upon certainty: that is their whole *raison d'être*. And yet, in a way, this paradoxical, bizarre maxim could almost encapsulate the whole meaning of the play.⁴⁶

8. Explicit References to Truth, Belief or

Plausibility

In a play such as *Helen*, where the nature of reality is so obscure, and where the question of what actually happened is so difficult to answer, any occurrence of the language of truth, belief, coherence or plausibility is liable to ring an alarm bell in the mind of the spectator or reader, even when no explicit doubts are being expressed.⁴⁷ The characters express a range of attitudes, including credulity, incredulity and various degrees of scepticism or confusion, but through their words we are also being prompted to examine our own beliefs and to think more deeply about the nature of truth itself.⁴⁸

Many of the characters implicitly or explicitly question the truth or credibility of events. For example, Helen herself throws doubt on her own life story, early on in the prologue (the function of which may thus be seen as programmatic):

πατήρ δὲ Τυνδάρεως· ἔστιν δὲ δὴ

λόγος τις ὡς Ζεὺς μητέρ' ἔπτατ' εἰς ἐμὴν

Λήδαν κύκνου μορφώματ' ὄρνιθος λαβῶν

ὃς δόλιον εὐνὴν ἐξέπραξ' ὑπ' αἰετοῦ

δίωγμα φεύγων, εἰ σαφὴς οὗτος λόγος

My father is Tyndareus; but there is

a certain story that Zeus flew to my

mother Leda, assuming the form of a swan

in flight from an eagle's pursuit, and slept with her deceitfully—

if that story is true

Helen 17–21

Is the story true or not?⁴⁹ Helen seems to leave the question open. She does not even seem concerned as to which tale is true, and indeed she gives an unsettling impression of impersonal detachment from events that are supposedly central to her own life. In effect, Helen is leaving it up to the reader to decide which of the two accounts to believe; or, perhaps, to mistrust both accounts equally. The word Helen uses to denote the reliability of the story is not ἀληθής or ἔτυμος but σαφής, which does not literally mean ‘true’ (though it is often treated as if it did); a better translation would be ‘plausible’, ‘clear’, ‘credible’, ‘comprehensible’, or something along those lines. The choice of word

is significant because it seems deliberately to evade the question of the literal truth or falsehood of the story in question. In fact we find the word *σαφής* and its cognates scattered throughout the play precisely at points where the question of truth or plausibility is raised as a potential problem.⁵⁰ As the plot unfolds, our understanding of the word is progressively modified and complicated but not elucidated [2, above], and the relationship of ‘clarity’ to truth remains obscure.

9. Explicit References to Ambiguity or Interpretative Difficulties

From time to time Euripides makes his characters refer openly to the problem of ambiguity or the inherent difficulties of language—including explicit attempts to define or question the meaning of words, and explicit references to the process of interpretation.⁵¹ Helen, for example, directly questions the meaning of the word beauty (*κάλλος*), wondering if it can truly be called beautiful (*καλόν*) when it has brought her such misfortune (27); and the same word is problematised later on by Menelaus, who cannot determine what constitutes ‘fine’ behaviour (*οὐχὶ τοῦτο τὸ καλόν, εἰ καλὸν τόδε, | αἰρήσομαι*, ‘I shall not choose this fine conduct, if it really is fine’, 952–3). A related effect is seen in a song of the chorus, who pose the difficult question *ὅ τι θεὸς ἢ μὴ θεὸς ἢ τὸ μέσον | τίς φησ’ ἐρευνάσας βροτῶν?* (‘What human can say, even after enquiring into the matter, what is a god, or not a god, or somewhere in between?’ 1137–9). Their bewilderment may stem from a difficulty in understanding what the word *θεός* literally means, or it may reflect frustration at the elusive nature of the gods; but either way, the crucial point is that no mortal can hope to understand such matters.

But this play’s most striking example of interpretative *aporia* occurs when Menelaus is finally presented with the fact that there are two ‘Helens’ (489–99). The whole situation in which he finds himself is ambiguous, far beyond his intellectual capacity to cope with it. How can it be (he wonders) that there are two ‘Helens’? Are there two ‘Zeuses’ as well? Are there two ‘Spartas’, two ‘Troys’? What do names mean? Menelaus’ comprehension of language and reality breaks down completely as he contemplates such alarming questions (*ἐγὼ μὲν οὐκ ἔχω τί χρὴ λέγειν*, ‘What must I say? I do not have the right words’, 496).

10. Explicit References to Knowledge

As it is implied that everything is unclear, anything that resembles a confident claim to knowledge from one of the characters inevitably comes to seem ironical. Sometimes Euripides underlines the irony by adding further emphasis—as when Helen claims that Menelaus knows everything, *so it seems*, about her relationship with Paris (πάντ' οἷοθ' ἄρ', ὥς ἔοικας, ἀμφ' ἐμῶν γάμων, 793—the parenthetical disclaimer completely undermines the claim), or when Helen expresses the view that ‘there is no point in knowing anything’ (κέρδος μὲν οὐδὲν εἰδέναι, 763; cf. 156–7). Even though in all these scenes Helen seems to be trying hard to convince others of her trustworthiness, her choice of words makes her seem disingenuous and self-contradictory.

This type of ambiguity also encompasses the presence of characters whose level of knowledge is inappropriate or inconsistent. Helen, like many characters in tragedy,⁵² temporarily assumes an apparent omniscience—or even, perhaps, a quasi-authorial narrative voice—for the purposes of the prologue speech, but loses it later on. The chorus are also granted a privileged perspective on events, as well as an unnaturally detailed knowledge of myth, history and theology. This belies their status as normal Greek women and makes one uncertain about the nature of their identity and voice; but in this respect, of course, they differ little from other choruses in tragedy, whose unsettling combination of anonymity, authority and knowledge tends to sit oddly alongside their supposed status as ordinary or lowly people. There is also the prophetess Theonoe: we are repeatedly told of her omniscience (12–13, 317–18, 530, 823), but in fact she shows no sign of knowing anything except facts that the other characters (or the readers) have already discovered for themselves; and indeed the existence of an allegedly omniscient character in a play that fundamentally questions the whole concept of knowledge must be seen as provocative and paradoxical [3, above].

11. Ambiguous References to (Someone’s) State of Mind

At line 352, Helen uses the word ἀσύνετα (‘unclear’ or ‘unintelligible’) when referring to a report of Menelaus’ death. This word is ambiguous in the sense described above [10], but it is also ambiguous in another sense, in that the unclearness or unintelligibility in question affects not only the characters in the play but also the audience or reader. In other words, this adjective belongs to a category of words that evoke an emotional or cognitive state in *someone’s* mind without specifying *whose* mind.⁵³

This technique is used repeatedly in connection with surprise at unforeseen developments in the plot. It is tempting to read it as a form of implicit comment by Euripides on his own dramaturgical technique or mythological innovation. For example, when Menelaus tells Helen that he was saved by an unhopèd-for turn of events (ἐσώθην μόλις ἀνελπίστῳ τύχῃ, 412), the adjective ἀνελπίστῳ seems to denote that the happenings being narrated are ‘unexpected’ both to Menelaus (in terms of his own experience) and to the reader (in terms of a plot twist). Helen herself agrees that Menelaus’ arrival on the scene is surprising (ἦκεις ἄελπιτος, 783), and Menelaus uses a similar phrase (ἄελπτα γὰρ λέγεις, 585: ‘you are talking about things unhopèd-for’) when he hears the story of Helen’s phantom double. Here again the characters’ reaction seems to anticipate or reflect that of the reader: the plot does not correspond to Homer or any other single version of the myth,⁵⁴ and thus it seems astonishing to everyone, both inside and outside the play.

This double frame of reference is seen most explicitly in the play’s anapaestic five-line ending (1688–92), which is less subtle in its blurring of the boundary between the world of the play and the real-life world of the audience [13, below]. In these lines (which recur in several other Euripidean plays, and which have often been thought spurious⁵⁵) our attention is drawn three times to the unexpected nature of events that have been witnessed, while the last line all but acknowledges the fact that we have just been watching a play:

πολλὰ μορφαὶ τῶν δαίμονων,
πολλὰ δ’ ἄελπτως κραίνουσι θεοί·
καὶ τὰ δοκηθέντ’ οὐκ ἐτελέσθη,
τῶν δ’ ἀδοκίμων πόρον ἦρε θεός.
τοιόνδ’ ἀπέβη τόδε πρᾶγμα.

Supernatural powers take many shapes;
gods bring about many things unexpectedly;
things that were expected were not brought to pass;
a god found a way of achieving the unforeseen:
this action turned out in just such a way.

12. Distancing Phrases

Many apparently straightforward statements of fact in *Helen* are accompanied by parenthetical qualifying phrases such as ὡς λόγος ('so the story goes'), ὡς φασί ('as they say'), κλήιζεται ('it is said [that]'), ὡς ἀκούομεν ('as we hear'), and so on.⁵⁶ As with certain other types of expression discussed here, these phrases are widely found in other contexts and do not always create ambiguity. Nevertheless, in Euripides the unusually frequent occurrence and the positioning of such phrases seem designed to add special emphasis, and to make us question the meaning or authenticity of the statements that they qualify. In each case the speaker distances himself or herself from the statement by attributing it to other, unnamed people. The distancing phrase may imply disbelief in the particular myth under discussion, or it may denote a more radical lack of confidence in language, myth or knowledge.

Such an attitude seems particularly incongruous if the speaker is supposedly recounting events from their own life. For example, Helen, when describing her genealogy, says that '*there is a story that Zeus flew to my mother in the form of a swan*' (ἔστιν δὲ δὴ λόγος ὡς . . . , 17–18), and she later mentions the egg-shell 'in which *they say* Leda bore me' (φασίν, 259). When Teucer asks Helen whether she knows Achilles, she replies, 'Yes, he once came to woo Helen, *so we hear*' (ὡς ἀκούομεν, 99). Helen gives us the impression that she is the subject of widespread discussion and storytelling;⁵⁷ but who are these unnamed people who are talking about her? Surely they include the readers of the play, as well as all those who have recounted or listened to tales of the Trojan War. By the use of these distancing phrases Helen indirectly acknowledges that she is actually referring to disputed and unverifiable myths, and that she herself is a mythical character, whose tradition encompassed a large number of strange or irreconcilable details.⁵⁸

13. Utterances that Could be Read as References to an Extra-Dramatic World

If my interpretation of those last lines quoted above is valid, it might be thought that we are dealing with a 'breaking of the dramatic illusion', or even, perhaps, a species of 'metatheatricity'. In fact such terms, derived as they are from twentieth-century theatrical conventions, are not quite satisfactory. Greek tragedy was not really an illusory or realistic form of theatre, and in any case the passages above are not drawing attention to their own theatricality as such. Furthermore, it has been argued that fifth-century tragedy never self-

consciously draws attention to its fictive status as drama, in contrast to other genres such as comedy,⁵⁹ and there is nothing in Euripides resembling the brashly overt metatheatrical techniques of the comedians.⁶⁰ But in spite of all these considerations, it remains true that the ambiguity, and the peculiar tone that readers have so often detected in these passages, seems to lie in a deliberate relaxation of the conventions by which the mimetic, self-contained reality of the play's world is normally created and maintained. That is, Euripides does seem to be using ambiguity to undermine the reality or credibility of the fictional scenario, or to make us acutely aware of the distinction between the world of the play and the real world in which the audience live.

Recently Isabelle Torrance has made a compelling case for reading Euripidean 'illusion-breaking' not as metatheatrical but as *metapoetic* in nature.⁶¹ That is, Euripides is seen as drawing attention to the fact that his play is a work of literary fiction; he is placing himself in a long line of self-conscious poets, because he is writing within an inherently agonistic literary tradition in which each successive poet was concerned to highlight his own originality and skill.⁶² Torrance identifies a number of potential signals of metapoetic activity in the works of Euripides, including references to writing and reading, the self-conscious use of the word *καίνος* to indicate literary innovation, the discourse of *ekphrasis*, and other intertextual markers connoting the epigonal status of Euripides' own work. Not all of these signals are seen in *Helen*, but it may be that Menelaus' words *παλαιότης γὰρ τῷ λόγῳ γ' ἐνεστί τις* ('there is a certain old-fashioned air to that suggestion', 1056), a reaction to Helen's proposal to announce his death, could be read as archly drawing the reader's attention to an overdone motif that Euripides himself is going to avoid in this play (since both Aeschylus and Sophocles had used false reports of characters' deaths as a plot device).⁶³

14. Suggestive Juxtaposition

Euripides occasionally uses juxtaposition to create unexpected connections or parallels between disparate people or things. The nature of the connection is not spelled out explicitly, but the fact that a link of some sort has been established is striking and often unsettling. Perhaps the most puzzling instance in *Helen* of this sort of juxtaposition is seen in the relationship of the 'Demeter ode' (1301–68) to the play as a whole.⁶⁴ The entire ode can be seen as ambiguous because it has no straightforward narrative or thematic connection to the themes or action of the plot; yet at the same time some of its

central elements and images—including, in particular, the abduction of young women, and the mention of beauty—do seem obliquely or suggestively similar to Helen's experiences. But many aspects remain obscure. Is it being implied that the plot of *Helen* can be understood as a form of *anodos* myth, or even an analogue of the mystery rituals of Demeter and Kore? How is it that parthenaic motifs are being used in connection with Helen, who is not a young virgin but a middle-aged wife? These questions are left intriguingly open.

A more disturbing use of suggestive parallels in *Helen* takes the form of a series of verbal and thematic echoes of the events of the Trojan War. These echoes are incongruous and strikingly at odds with the 'new Helen'. The whole play supposedly presents itself as being based on the idea that Homer was wrong about Helen and what happened at Troy. Nevertheless, even though Helen repeatedly claims that the old stories are false and misleading, it gradually becomes apparent that what we are witnessing on stage is, in a sense, a repetition or re-enactment of those stories. Once again Helen is the object of rival men's affections; once again she is the cause of strife and bloodshed; once again jealous goddesses (Hera and Aphrodite) are at odds with one another, as in the myth of the Judgement of Paris (1005–7); once again a sea battle is fought for Helen's sake between Greeks and foreign enemies (1589–1612); once again the 'glory of Troy' is evoked (1602–3). . . . All of these echoes of the traditional version make it difficult to disentangle old (false) from new (true) stories. Rather, they seem to imply that one cannot escape the past, and that essentially nothing has changed.

15. Intertextual Echoes

Here and there a detail may specifically recall an earlier literary work by Euripides himself or some other writer. For instance, Teucer's cryptic statement that 'the mind sees' (ὁ νοῦς ὁρᾷ, 122) seems to be taken from Epicharmus;⁶⁵ Menelaus' description of his astonishment and speechlessness (ἔκπληξις, ἀφασία, 548–9) is more or less a quotation or paraphrase from Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen*;⁶⁶ Menelaus' description of his travels at 766–71 includes a reference to the plot of *Palamedes*, one of Euripides' own recent productions; while the chorus' song about the mournful nightingale (1107–21) reuses descriptive language from Aristophanes' *Birds*.⁶⁷ In each of these cases the purpose of the allusion (as far as it can be judged) seems to be slightly different, but for the purposes of our discussion the main point is simply that another literary work is being evoked. This intertextual echo means that, in effect, one is reading two separate works, the old

and the new, simultaneously, and a certain sense of dissonance or doubleness results.

What has been called ‘counterpoint characterization’ also falls into this category.⁶⁸ Whenever we encounter a character in a tragedy, we are actually *re-encountering* them from some other appearance in literature or myth (except in a few exceptional cases of newly invented characters). This fact can lead to a sense of *déjà vu*, which may vary in intensity and which may be deliberately evoked or exploited by the playwright. In particular, the chameleon-like character of Helen is significantly different in all the plays (by Euripides and others) in which she appears.⁶⁹ In *Helen* it seems that Euripides wants us to be aware of previous Helens in poetry and drama, for it is precisely the difference between these different versions of the heroine that makes it so difficult to evaluate the ‘new Helen’ before our eyes.⁷⁰ But which Helen is the real one? Perhaps they are *all* real; or perhaps none of them is.

16. Conditionals and Counterfactuals

The use of conditionals and counterfactuals to evoke alternative scenarios constitutes another source of ambiguity, in that they conjure up possible versions of the story that the author *might* have told, or different details of the myth that the author *might* have chosen. The reader cannot help but contemplate these alternative narrative possibilities, even if only for a brief moment.

‘In all fictions, each time a man meets diverse alternatives, he chooses one and eliminates the others.’ So speaks the narrator of Jorge Luis Borges’ story *The Garden of Forking Paths*, a work that imagines the consequences of a narrative in which *all* possible narrative choices are taken, resulting in a ‘labyrinthine’ text; Borges suggests that narrative choices that are raised and then discarded may indirectly draw attention to the omission.⁷¹

In just this way the whole plot of *Helen* evokes two separate narratives—a version in which Helen did go to Troy with Paris, and a counterfactual version in which she did not—and even though the second version is chosen as the basis for the play’s action, the other version of the story is not ignored: far from it. Indeed, the more familiar story is continually held before the reader’s mind, as are a number of other versions of the Helen story—a mythical tradition that is unusually complex and full of inconsistencies.⁷² The unusual effect created by this tragedy arises because the reader is continually being

invited to judge between the different narrative possibilities and to wonder on what basis one could ever choose a single true version.

‘What if . . . ?’ is a question that is posed at several points throughout *Helen*. Because the play’s storyline was largely invented by Euripides, it would have been unclear to the audience how it would all end; and as the plot develops, various other possible outcomes are suggested. (What if Menelaus had been lost at sea? What if Theoclymenus were to marry Helen? What if he were to kill Menelaus or Theonoe?) The characters themselves explicitly evoke yet more counterfactual scenarios: what if Helen had been born ugly (262–6)? What if Pelops had died on the day of his fatal chariot race against Oenomaus, so that he would never have married and thus Menelaus would never have been born (386–92)? Both Helen and Menelaus introduce these possible narratives in the form εἴθε-plus-optative (‘if only . . .’), and even though they quickly move on to other topics, these extra versions, suggesting other tragic plots that could have been written, have been memorably conjured up. What the reader is to make of these narrative possibilities is unclear. Is the possibility of an ugly Helen any more or less plausible than the possibility of a Helen who did not go to Troy?

Conditional clauses are used in a more limited way to leave possibilities open. One intriguing device is the use of unresolved conditional clauses—in which the speaker raises a possibility but leaves it unclear whether or not the condition is fulfilled, or in which there is protasis but no apodosis: for instance, εἰ σαφὴς οὗτος λόγος (‘if that story is true’, 21), εἰ καλὸν τὸ δυστυχές (‘if this wretched thing can be called fine’, 27), εἰ βαζις ἔτυμος (‘if the rumour is true’, 351), εἰ γάρ εἰσιν οἱ θεοὶ σοφοί (‘if the gods are *sophoi*’, 851), εἰ δ’ οὔσα μάντις (‘if you have second sight’, 919), and so on. *If* things were so, then the consequences would be as follows; but *are* things so? No one can say for sure.

17. Plurality and Openness

The open acknowledgement that multiple—divergent or contradictory—statements may simultaneously be true is the most extreme type of ambiguity in *Helen*, as well as perhaps the most radical in terms of its consequences for our understanding of reality. I have mentioned Menelaus’ lines (489–99) in which he speculates whether there could actually be two Zeuses, two Helens, two Troys, two Spartas [9, above]. Elsewhere he also points out that, owing to the existence of the phantom double, Helen was in a sense both in Egypt and in Troy

at the same time (587). But the most explicit statement of the doubleness of reality is seen in the following exchange between Helen and Teucer (137–9), where Helen asks whether her brothers are alive or dead:

Ελ.	οἱ Τυνδάρειοι δ' εἰσὶν ἢ οὐκ εἰσὶν κόροι;
Τε.	τεθνᾶσι καὶ τεθνᾶσι· δύο δ' ἐστὸν λόγῳ.
Ελ.	πότερος ὁ κρείσσων;
Helen:	But as for the sons of Tyndareus— do the young men live or not?
Teucer:	They are dead and not dead: there are two stories.
Helen:	Which is the more powerful?

Helen 137–9

In these two versions of the truth the Dioscuri are simultaneously *both* dead *and* alive: surely the two stories cannot both be true? But perhaps they are, however confusing and paradoxical [3, above] this may seem. (Whether the brothers killed themselves or whether they were deified in the form of stars, they are no longer ‘alive’ in a normal sense; though this is not necessarily the meaning implied here.) In any case, Helen does not ask which of the two versions represents the truth. Instead, she asks which version is ‘the more powerful’ (ὁ κρείσσων). This constitutes an intertextual allusion [15, above] to Protagoras’ theory that truth is relative, not absolute, and that on every topic one can construct two opposing arguments (δισσοὶ λόγοι), a weaker and a stronger.⁷³ What counts as the more powerful story seems to be its persuasive qualities or its appeal in a particular situation. But still one is bound to wonder what *did* happen to the Dioscuri in the end.⁷⁴

Is there only one reality? Is truth singular or plural? These questions are left tantalisingly unanswered at the end of the play, which also leaves open the question of which Helen is the ‘real’ one (the traditional, Homeric man-eater or the new, Egyptian chaste wife). When Menelaus says that it is impossible for him, a single husband, to have two wives (οὐ μὴν γυναικῶν γ' εἷς δυοῖν ἔφυν πόσις, 571) his words strike us as full of irony, since in a very real sense there *are* indeed two—or even, perhaps, an infinite number of—Helens. Certainly Euripides uses this play to make his readers more aware than ever that the mythical tradition is characterised by plurality,

openness and contestability. At the end of *Helen*, the concept of a single reliable account of the story, or an ‘authorised version’ of the myth—or even a unitary conception of reality itself—becomes impossible to sustain.

Notes

- 1 See Wright (2005, 226–337) for extended discussion.
- 2 See most recently Torrance (2013, 1–6 and *passim*, citing a volume of earlier scholarship); cf. Nestle (1901), Reinhardt (1957), Vellacott (1975), Foley (1985), Winnington-Ingram (1969), Mastronarde (2010, 44–52, 307–8), Michelini (1987, 3–51), Mossman (2003, 4–6).
- 3 Empson (1953, 1). In the original edition (1930), Empson defined ambiguity as a piece of language that ‘adds some nuance to the direct statement of prose’, but later amended this description because he realised that it stretched the meaning ‘so far that it becomes almost meaningless’. See also Jensen (1966).
- 4 Empson (1953, v–vi).
- 5 See Haffenden (2005, esp. 185–229, 277–80).
- 6 See Stanford (1939) for an early attempt to apply Empson to Greek literature, but he is not much concerned with tragedy or Euripides. Cf. Hug (1871), who (long before Empson) identified six categories of ambiguity in Sophocles.
- 7 On the difficulties involved in theoretical categorisation of literary phenomena, see Rosenmeyer (1996, esp. 510): ‘Taxonomy is an arid exercise and by its nature unstoppable, but has its uses where significant distinctions are widely ignored’.
- 8 On this distinction see Jakobson (1960).
- 9 Eco (1989, esp. 1–6); cf. Eco (1979, 47–66).
- 10 See Solmsen (1934); Kannicht (1969, 1: 57–8); Segal (1971); Wright (2005, 290–97).
- 11 Note, however, that the sophist Prodicus’ concern with correct/referential diction (ὀρθότης ὀνομάτων) seems to represent an attempt to reduce ambiguity: see A12–20 D–K.
- 12 Other examples include *Andr.* 66, 85, 770–71, 995 (μηχανή), 231, 237, 252 (νοῦς); *Hcl.* 104, 138, 142, 143 (δίκαιος); *Tr.* 55, 231, 238, 260, 513 (νέος).
- 13 E.g. *E., Hec.* 612 (νύμφην τ’ ἄνυμφον παρθένον τ’ ἀπαρθένον), *El.* 1230 (φίλα τε καὶ φίλα), *Tr.* 625 (οὐ σαφῶς εἶπεν σαφές), *Or.* 546–7 (ἀνόσιός εἰμι . . . ὅσιος δε); *A., Ch.* 600 (ἀπέρωτος ἔρωτος); *S., El.* 1154 (μήτηρ ἀμήτωρ); cf. Heraclitus 22 B62, B67 D–K. See Seaford (2003) for discussion.
- 14 The same phrase describes the marriage of Oedipus and Jocasta at *S., OT* 1214. Cf. Helen’s epithet δύσγαμος at *E., Tr.* 1114.
- 15 This double sense of γάμον ἄγαμον is brought out by Willink (1989, 67). Note that Helen later refers specifically to her union with Paris using the phrase αἰσχροῖς γαμοῖς (*Hel.* 697).
- 16 Buber (1994a) and (1994b). The concept of *Leitwörter* could in theory be applied to the works of many authors, but it is not (apparently) found, as such, in Classical scholarship. See, however, Bundy (1986) for the identification of ‘key words’ or ‘climactic terms’ in Pindar; cf. Willcock (1995, 15–20) on φυά, πόνος, πλοῦτος, φθόνος, καιρός and other ‘words full of meaning’ that recur

in that poet's work.

- 17 Buber (1994a, 124); the concept is illustrated with specific examples from *Numbers* 16–17 (y-‘a-d, ‘edah, qarev and cognate words related to the idea of ‘appointment’).
- 18 *Hel.* 513, 578, 811, 851, 1049, 1242, 1441, 1528.
- 19 Seen especially at *Hipp.* 641–2 (σοφὴν δὲ μισῶ· μὴ γὰρ ἔν γ’ ἐμοῖς δόμοις | εἴη φρονούσα πλεῖον· ἢ γυναιῖκα χρῆ); but cf. also *Andr.* 245, *Hcl.* 979, *Med.* 285, 294–305, Semonides fr. 7 etc. Cf. Origa (2007, 24–7).
- 20 E.g. *Ba.* 178–9, 395, 641, 655, 824, 877–81 = 897–901; *Andr.* 376, 379, 437, 479, 642–4, 957, 1165; *HF* 188–9, 202–7; *Med.* 285, 298, etc. (one could quote dozens of other examples). See, most recently, Origa (2007).
- 21 Different sorts of paradoxical expressions in Euripides include (e.g.) *El.* 1146–52, 1230, 1246; *Hcl.* 702–4; *Hec.* 608, 611–12; *Hipp.* 500; *IA* 305, 1139; *Ion* 854; *Or.* 546–7, 819; *Polydus* fr. 638; *Phrixus* fr. 833. Aristophanes parodies this tendency (*Ach.* 396, *Frogs* 1082).
- 22 Cf., perhaps, the function of paradoxical expressions in the philosophy of Antiphon (B15 D–K) and Heraclitus (B8, B50 D–K).
- 23 Empson (1953, 176–87).
- 24 Gorgias B11.1 D–K; cf. B3.
- 25 See Ar., *Thesm.* 39–51, 101–29; fr. 326; Pl., *Symp.* 198c, 194e–197e; Plu., *Mor.* 177a, etc. Cf. *TrGF* I (Snell), 157–61; discussion in Lévêque (1955, 157–61). For the influence of Gorgias on Agathon, see Philostratus *VS* 1.9.3. For an association between Euripides and Agathon see Plu., *Mor.* 177a; Aelian, *VH* 2.21; cf. Kovacs (1994, 58–9). On the question of whether Euripides was influenced by Gorgias, see Wright (2005, 258–9) (and cf. Pl., *Gorg.* 448c).
- 26 E.g. *Or.* 396–7 (sigmatic wordplay on σύνεσις/σοφόν/σαφές); *Oeneus* fr. 560 *TrGF* (a quasi-banal epigrammatic ‘jingle’, ἀλλ’ ἄλλος ἄλλοις μᾶλλον ἥδεται τρόποις); *Ba.* 905–6 (polyptoton and wordplay on ἑτέροι/ἕτερος/ἕτερον). Cf. Pl., *Gorg.* 448c, parodying a pupil of Gorgias (μεταλαμβάνουσιν ἄλλοι ἄλλων ἄλλως), and Aristophanes’ parody of Euripides at *Frogs* 1443–5. See also Winnington-Ingram (1969, 136–8), where Euripides is compared with Oscar Wilde and Bernard Shaw.
- 27 Note that the text has been disputed, no doubt because of its odd and obscure form. The lines as quoted here incorporate emendations by Blaydes and Jackson: see Jackson (1955, 41).
- 28 See Allan (2008) ad loc.; perhaps also cf. Ar., *Frogs* 1434 for wordplay based on the contrast between the terms σοφῶς and σαφῶς (in relation to the literary style of Aeschylus and Euripides).
- 29 S., *Ant.* 1 (‘O kindred, very-sisterly head of Ismene’). See Rutherford (2012, 70–72) on tragic periphrasis.
- 30 ‘Fragment of a Greek Tragedy’ (1883).
- 31 Wright (2005, 300–301).
- 32 The sense of confusion is increased by the use of other words denoting ‘image’ or ‘likeness’ in the lines that immediately follow (μίμημα 73, εἰκοῦς 77); cf. 262–3, where the ‘real’ Helen compares herself with an artistic image.
- 33 Cf. Anaximander A9, B1 D–K; Epicharmus B9 D–K; Heraclitus B27 D–K; E., *Supp.* 533–6. See Wright (1995, 121–3). The word αἰθῆρ in 1016 may also be linked to the same cosmological idea, and indeed the frequent recurrence of αἰθῆρ in *Hel.* (e.g. 44, 219, 246, 583–4, 605–6, 865–6, 1219) may mark it out as

a *Leitwort* [2].

- 34 Lines 1013–16 were excised by Hartung and Dindorf; cf. Sansone (1985, 29). See also Dale (1967) ad loc., who retains the lines but interprets them as ‘a piece of high-toned but vague mysticism. . . . [H]ow does a τίσις apply to a piece of consciousness floating in the ether?’
- 35 Fowler (1968, 5–6).
- 36 Other examples of ‘abstractitis’ include *Hel.* 269, 280–81, 778, 924–5, 1221. Cf. also *Alc.* 813; *Med.* 446–7; *Or.* 66, 85, 243, 283, 287 etc.
- 37 Cf. LSJ (s.v. τλάω): ‘to take upon oneself, to bear, to suffer, undergo; hold out; endure; be patient; submit; dare, venture to do; have the courage, hardihood, effrontery, cruelty, or to have the grace, patience to do anything; to dare a thing’.
- 38 Parthenic motifs appear throughout the play (1, 164–251, 1465–78); see Swift (2010, 218–38).
- 39 Cf. Lardinois (2006).
- 40 See Most (2003).
- 41 See Morson (2011), who describes quotations as having an implied ‘second speaker’; cf. Garber (2003).
- 42 σοφῶν δέ του is Dobree’s emendation of L’s σοφόν δ’ ἔπος, accepted by Kannicht (who finds the manuscript reading ‘tasteless’ as it makes Menelaus out to be not only foolish but also arrogant); Diggle and Allan (ad loc.) follow Kannicht; Dale retains L’s reading. The alteration makes little difference on one level—Menelaus is still obviously distancing himself from the maxim—but what is more interesting, perhaps, is the word σοφός, which is a Euripidean *Leitwort* [2]. Does this word mean ‘wise’ or merely ‘clever’? One’s interpretation of the meaning of σοφός will add further nuance to one’s reading of this maxim.
- 43 See Friis Johansen (1959, 151–9).
- 44 Cf. (e.g.) S., *Tr.* 1–4; E., *Hec.* 294–5, *Med.* 964–5, *Ph.* 388–9, 438–42, 469–72, *Supp.* 194–218 (where maxims are explicitly referred to using λόγος, ἔπος, παροιμία or similar term).
- 45 Cf. (e.g.) A., *Ch.* 59–65, 597–601; S., *Aj.* 664–5, *El.* 415–16; E., *El.* 290–96, 367–72, 743–4, *Ph.* 1726–7, etc.
- 46 Kannicht (1969, ad loc.) thinks the maxim is a paraphrase of Epicharmus fr. 150K: if so, there may be a further level of ambiguity, and a further voice to be detected here, via intertextual allusion.
- 47 E.g. (πιστεύω and cognates) 578, 710, 1230; (ψευδής etc.) 309, 745, 883; (ἀληθής etc.) 271, 307, 310, 530, 623, 709; (ἔτυμος) 351.
- 48 For this type of ambiguity cf. *Andr.* 791; *El.* 737–42; *HF* 1341–6; *Ion* 347, 987, 1090, 1608; *IT* 386–90 (etc.); and in general see Stinton (1976).
- 49 The same story is treated with scepticism by the chorus at *IA* 793–800; see Stinton (1976, 75).
- 50 *Hel.* 108, 308–9, 577–8, 796, 1149, 1200–1202.
- 51 Cf. also *Hec.* 294, 1187–94 (instability of speech in relation to reality); *Hipp.* 382–7 (difficulty of defining ἡδονή); *IA* 20–26 (difficulty of defining τὸ καλόν); *IT* 793–5 (deceptive λόγοι are discarded); *Supp.* 138 (interpretation of oracles), 486–7 (allusion to Protagoras); *Tr.* 583 and *Ion* 1490 (use of the term ἀμφίβολός), etc.
- 52 On this convention of prologues see Erbse (1984); cf. Goward (1999, 1–26).

- 53 For this type of ambiguity cf. *Hcl.* 797, *IT* 1495, *Or.* 693, 879, *Ph.* 311.
- 54 On Euripides' use of myth and his relationship to previous versions, see Wright (2005, 80–133).
- 55 See Roberts (1987).
- 56 E.g. *Hel.* 13, 99, 132, 136, 141, 256, 513–14, 614, 720, 926–8, 950–51, etc.
- 57 As when Helen and the other characters repeatedly refer to themselves as 'famous' (κλεινός vel sim.): *Hel.* 16, 41, 57–8, 105, 503–4, 453, 843–4, 1602, etc.
- 58 Cf. Wright (2005, 142–8) on 'metamythology'.
- 59 Taplin (1986); cf. Rosenmeyer (2002).
- 60 Even *Hel.* 262–6, which some have interpreted as a reference to the theatrical mask, contains no explicit illusion breaking, and is better understood as a reference to artworks: see Wright (2005, 326–8).
- 61 Torrance (2013).
- 62 Cf. Griffith (1990).
- 63 Torrance (2013, 22–3), comparing A., *Ch.* 674–90, S., *El.* 44–50, 673–763. On Euripidean καινότης, cf. MacDermott (1991).
- 64 See Barlow (1971, 23–4) on dissonance between choral odes and the surrounding action; cf. Swift (2010) for a recent treatment of the Demeter ode.
- 65 Epicharmus B8 D–K; see Kannicht (1969, 2: 50–51).
- 66 Gorgias B11 D–K; cf. Worman (2002, 131–2).
- 67 *Hel.* 1111–12 with Kannicht (1969) ad loc; cf. Ar., *Birds* 213–14 with Dunbar (1995) ad loc.: 'It is an attractive possibility . . . that for once Euripides may be imitating Aristophanes, not vice versa, though alternatively both may be imitating a common model unknown to us'.
- 68 Will (1960).
- 69 See Austin (1994) on the versatility of Helen's character in myth and literature.
- 70 Ar., *Thesm.* 850 (ἡ καὶνὴ Ἑλένη); cf. Kannicht (1969, 1: 21–4).
- 71 Borges (1998, 119–28; quotation from 125).
- 72 See Wright (2005, 80–135).
- 73 Protagoras A1, B6 D–K.
- 74 Note that other versions of the fate of the Dioscuri existed: cf. Pi., *N.* 10.55–114; Apollod., *Bibl.* 3.11.2.

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5 Multiple Ways to Access the Past

The Myth of Oedipus, Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and Herodotus' *Histories*

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The character of Oedipus can be placed at the confluence of many types of discourse that intersect with and respond to one another, and each offers multiple ways of understanding the past. Three such types will be considered here, albeit in differing ways: first of all, the myth of Oedipus;² secondly, one of Sophocles' Theban plays, *Oedipus Rex*; and lastly, the *historia* of Herodotus.³ The approximation of the first two can be justified on thematic and genetic grounds: the tragedy depicts the character of Oedipus and builds upon his myth, repeating it on the one hand and transforming it on the other. The approximation of the latter two, for its part, rests upon reasons that are simultaneously temporal, thematic and epistemological. Although Sophocles and Herodotus may not have been members of a 'Periclean Circle',⁴ they were nevertheless contemporaries whose connections are attested.⁵ Moreover, each clearly provided an intense discussion in their works of the awareness of reality and the sensory perception of the world.

In the tragedy, Oedipus undertakes an inquiry, just as Herodotus and certain of his characters do in the *Histories*.⁶ The verb *historein* occurs six times; and from a thematic point of view, even when the word is not used it is the method of *historia* that Oedipus claims for himself and puts into practice. In the course of researching his origins—his *genos*—Oedipus comes to suspect that the unknown man he has killed at the crossroads of Delphi and Daulis in Phocis is a relative of Laius (συγγενές, 814), before hearing from the Corinthian shepherd whom he questions that he himself is not a blood relation of Polybus (ἐν γένει, 1016). It is thus that, when faced by Jocasta—who wishes to make him forget what has just been said to him—Oedipus stubbornly persists in his inquiry, in order to clarify what his *genos* is. This inquiry is carried out through clues and traces:

οὐκ ἂν γένοιτο τοῦθ', ὅπως ἐγὼ λαβὼν

σημεῖα τοιαῦτ' οὐ φανῶ τοῦμὸν γένος.

With such clues

I could not fail to bring my birth to light

Sophocles, *OT* 1058–97

Herodotus, for his part, not only proceeds in a general fashion to the ‘display of my inquiry’ (ιστορίας ἀπόδεξις, 1.1)—notably in Egypt where he himself collected his clues—but also produces stories throughout his work, usually in dramatic fashion, about tyrants, Greek or barbarian, all-powerful rulers, and often engaged in inquiries of their own.⁸ One thinks of Croesus, king of Lydia (1.32–56, 69–92), or the Mede Astyages, grandfather of Cyrus the Great (particularly 1.114–20), or Periander, tyrant of Corinth (notably 1.23–4, 3.46–53), Cambyses of Persia (3.27–38, 61–6), Polycrates of Samos (3.40–44, 3.120–25), or Xerxes (7.8–19). Moreover, as is well known, in these stories the plots contain sequences analogous to what we find in the *OT*: the questioning of attendants, especially shepherds entrusted with the task of exposing a royal infant and who in the end have failed to complete their task; oracles or divine visions and their interpretations—more or less relevant, more or less accepted; the killing of a parent; incest; and all under the aegis of Solonian morals. Indeed, Herodotus devotes the beginning of book one (30–33) to a long extrapolation of this moral and continues to develop its various manifestations in the fates of tyrants, especially by elaborating the theme of unexpected misfortune (*sumphore*), widely present also in the *OT*. As for Creon, he closes the tragedy of Sophocles with the precept of Solon in its purest sense:

ὥστε θνητὸν ὄντ' ἐκείνην τὴν τελευταίαν ἰδεῖν

ἡμέραν ἐπισκοποῦντα μηδέν' ὀλβίζειν, πρὶν ἄν

τέρμα τοῦ βίου περάσῃ μηδὲν ἀλγεῖνόν παθών.

Look upon that last day always. Count no mortal happy till

He has passed the final limit of his life secure from pain.

Sophocles, *OT* 1528–30

Everything is in place, then, for a dialogue between Sophocles and Herodotus on the modes of understanding reality, and especially the past.

The Past of and within the Myth of Oedipus

The story of Oedipus is first and foremost a myth: that is to say, it produces a type of story whose temporal characteristics offer multiple peculiarities. First of all, if a myth has once had an author in the distant past, then all trace of that author is gone. As Claude Lévi-Strauss notes,⁹ one can reasonably suppose that all myths take their origin in the creation of an individual, but, ‘in order to pass into the status of myth, it is precisely necessary that a creation does not remain individual, but loses, in the course of this elevation, the essence of the properties that follow from the probability which initially permeated it and which could be attributed to the temperament, talent, imagination, and personal experiences of its author’.¹⁰ As for the myth of Oedipus, the oldest version that we have is found in the *Odyssey* (11.271–80), during the *nekuia* where Odysseus meets Oedipus’ mother (here called Epicaste); but this version cannot be regarded as the origin of the story.¹¹

Moreover, myth is in a constant state of transformation in the course of its repetitions, which can be anonymous or not and in oral form as well as dramatic, written or figurative. The myth of Oedipus uses narrative motifs included elsewhere in traditional stories:¹² the prophecy of patricide; the prophecy of incest; the exposal of the infant to thwart the prophecy; the pity of the man who must perform the exposal; the salvation of the child; the rearing of the child in a foreign court; the fulfilment of the prophecy and murder of the father; and the fulfilment of the prophecy of incest. Nevertheless, if we find these motifs in the *OT*, Sophocles still combines them with others that entered the later Western tradition:¹³ the pierced ankles of the hero; his departure for Corinth after being treated as illegitimate; the resolution of the riddle of the Sphinx, which causes the death of the monster; Oedipus’ elevation to king of Thebes; the plague; the origin of his inquiry into Laius’ death; his discovery of his crimes; Jocasta’s suicide; and Oedipus’ self-blinding. The innovations of Sophocles were thus an important step in the chain of transformations of the myth, but it did not stop here. In his other Theban plays, Sophocles effectively develops other aspects of the myth without having to align them chronologically or dramatically. The end of the *OT*, in particular, has posed lexical, dramaturgical and thematic problems since the eighteenth century.¹⁴ But many of the difficulties encountered have been due to the fact that scholars have often wished to make the Theban plays of Sophocles a trilogy in the specific sense that this word assumed in the Athenian dramatic competitions, and required of them to present collectively coherent plot-lines with chronological

continuity.¹⁵ Yet the different retellings of a myth can end when the internal logic of each demands, without a need for them to be harmonised chronologically with one another so as to form a continuous narrative.

This internal logic is due to a third feature of myth, in addition to the fact that its origins are lost in the mists of time and that it is transformed through constant repetition. This feature is that myth explains in universal terms—albeit with a limited repertoire of forms of expression—the logical problems of understanding the world posed by the societies in which myth circulates,¹⁶ but in a particularly distinctive manner. This is why C. Lévi-Strauss proposes to conceive of myth as an ‘intellectual jumble’ (*bricolage intellectuel*), which falls within the ‘science of the concrete’ (*science du concret*). In a ‘closed instrumental universe’ (*univers instrumental clos*), myth effectively proceeds by the ‘means at its disposal’ (*les moyens du bord*), which are located at a midway point between precepts and concepts, in the manner of a sign, ‘a concrete entity, which nonetheless resembles a concept in its referential power’ (*être concret mais qui ressemble au concept par son pouvoir référentiel*).¹⁷ The final motif of blinding—which does not figure in the version of the myth given in the *Odyssey*¹⁸—appears particularly consonant with the part given to autopsy and to stories acquired through *akoe* in the *historia*, in the course of which Oedipus questions the divine truth revealed to him, and which leads him to realise his misfortune. But this also ties into a broader problem, this time contemporary with the *OT* and the *Histories*, which a comparison of the two enables one to perceive: that the problem of understanding the world through human perception poses dangers that are demonological as much as physical. On the one hand, when resorting to perception, man comes to terms with the divine knowledge that delivers its results in the revelations of seers or oracles; on the other hand, he is physically threatened with invasion by the outside world without being able to stop the intrusions of sights and sounds, especially of words that other people are uttering. The Sophoclean version of the myth of Oedipus poses at least these two questions, which will be discussed here in turn.

Two Ways to Access Reality

Like the *Oedipus Rex*, the *Histories* of Herodotus delineates two routes of access to the reality of past events: that of revelation, and that of gradual inquiry through clues and partial information to be evaluated and organised.

Aletheia

The reality obtained by way of revelation is *aletheia*: this denotes that which now ceases to escape the present and offers itself to human view, by being wrested from the sphere of the forgotten.

Usually such revelation is of a divine character: it operates in the form of oracles that bring all to light. When he reports the words of Phoebus Apollo, it is *prouphane* that Oedipus attests:

μ' ὁ Φοῖβος ὦν μὲν ἰκόμην
ἄτιμον ἐξέπεμψεν, ἄλλα δ' ἀθλίῳ
καὶ δεινὰ καὶ δύστηνα προῦφάνη λέγων,
ὡς μητρὶ μὲν χρεῖη με μιχθῆναι, γένος δ'
ἄτλητον ἀνθρώποισι δηλώσοιμ' ὄρᾱν,
φονεὺς δ' ἐσοίμην τοῦ φυτεύσαντος πατρός.

But Phoebus sent me home again unhonored
In what I came to learn, but he foretold
Other and desperate horrors to befall me,
That I was fated to lie with my mother,
And show to daylight an accursed breed
Which men would not endure, and I was doomed
To be murderer of the father that begot me.

Sophocles, *OT* 788–93

Another possibility is that the actor becomes conscious (by chance, but with evidence) of the divine sway over his own fate or that of another. Thus Amasis, the Egyptian king and guest-friend of the tyrant Polycrates of Samos, shows anxiety about the prosperity of his friend; and, fearing that he should incur divine jealousy (3.40),¹⁹ abandons Polycrates to his fate upon understanding that his attempt to interrupt the permanence of his (too) great happiness has been miraculously thwarted. Specifically, contrary to all expectation, Polycrates discovers in the stomach of a fish gifted to him by a fisherman a precious ring, which he had previously chosen to throw away into the sea—that is, without any possibility of recovery—and takes this occurrence as the signification of grief to come:

τὸν δὲ ὡς ἐσῆλθε θεῖον εἶναι τὸ πρῆγμα γράφει ἐς βυβλίον πάντα τὰ ποιήσαντά μιν οἷα καταλελάβηκε γράψας δὲ ἐς Αἴγυπτον ἐπέθηκε. ἐπιλεξάμενος δὲ ὁ Ἄμασις τὸ βυβλίον τὸ παρὰ τοῦ Πολυκράτεος ἦκον, ἔμαθε ὅτι ἐκκομίσαι τε ἀδύνατον εἶη ἀνθρώπῳ ἄνθρωπον ἐκ τοῦ μέλλοντος γίνεσθαι πρῆγματος καὶ ὅτι οὐκ εὖ τελευτήσῃν μέλλοι Πολυκράτης εὐτυχέων τὰ πάντα, ὃς καὶ τὰ ἀποβάλλοι εὕρισκοι.

It occurred to Polycrates that this might be a religious portent, so he wrote in a letter a thorough account of what he had done and what had happened and sent it to Egypt. When Amasis read the letter from Polycrates, he realized that it was impossible for one person to rescue another from what was going to happen and that, because he was so completely lucky that he even found things he had thrown away, Polycrates was fated to die miserably.

Hdt. 3.42–320

Later in book three, after Polycrates is ignominiously put to death by the satrap Oroetes, the narrator recognises that Amasis, like a prophet, must have had access to the divine plan:

Πολυκράτεος μὲν δὴ αἱ πολλαὶ εὐτυχίαι ἐς τοῦτο ἐτελεύτησαν τῇ οἱ Ἄμασις ὁ Αἰγύπτου βασιλεὺς προεμαντεύσατο.

So for all his good fortune, Polycrates died as King Amasis of Egypt had said (*proemanteusato*) he would.

Hdt. 3.125

The demise of the Persian king Cambyses presents a similar case. When he has just heard from the mouth of his own henchman Prexaspes that the Magus Patizeithes and his brother Smerdis, to whom he had entrusted the care of his house, have risen up in rebellion against the royal power in the palace, Cambyses has an intuition of what has happened (‘intuition’ here being used in its Aristotelian sense of the term as thought not logically articulated, and close to vision). In a dream, he had mistaken the Magus for his brother Smerdis, and he then had the latter killed in order to avoid a coup:

ἐνθαῦτα ἀκούσαντα Καμβύσῃν τὸ Σμέρδιος οὖνομα ἔτυψε ἡ ἀληθείη τῶν τε λόγων καὶ τοῦ ἐνυπνίου· ὃς ἐδόκεε ἐν τῷ ὕπνῳ ἀπαγγεῖλαι τινὰ οἱ ὡς Σμέρδις ἰζόμενος ἐς τὸν βασιλῆιον θρόνον ψαύσειε τῇ κεφαλῇ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ. μαθὼν δὲ ὡς μάτην ἀπολωλεκῶς εἶη τὸν ἀδελφεόν, ἀπέκλειε Σμέρδιν.

When Cambyses heard the name ‘Smerdis’ he was struck by the truth of what Prexaspes had said and saw the true meaning of the dream, in which someone had brought him a message that Smerdis was sitting on the royal throne with his head touching the sky. When he realized (μαθὼν) that he had pointlessly killed his brother, he was overwhelmed with grief for him.

The divine atmosphere is introduced by coincidences that pepper the course of events. Immediately after weeping for his brother, Cambyses leaps onto his horse in order to march with all speed against the Magi and, in doing so, wounds his leg in precisely the same spot where he had once lethally struck a manifestation of the Egyptian god Apis. Moreover, he learns that he happens to be in the place where an oracle once predicted his death. Reality thus imposes itself on him in all its proof: he was mistaken, and he has reached the end of his life.

Albeit less monstrous, the case of Croesus presents similar characteristics. When after being conquered by Cyrus he mounts the pyre on which the Persian king intends to sacrifice him, it suddenly ‘comes upon him’ (ἐσελθεῖν), that it had been the work of the god (σὺν θεῷ) that Solon had previously told him ‘no living man is truly happy’ (1.86).²¹

The corollary of such instances of the reality perceived as *aletheia*, that is, a reality brought suddenly to the light, is that the actors have access to it neither by reason nor by reflection; or, if like Oedipus they lay claim to such a process, then they can do nothing to stop themselves from meeting the misfortune that has already been revealed to them. The character of Oedipus abruptly acquires knowledge (μαθεῖν) like Amasis; truth strikes him (τύψαι) like Cambyses; the revelation comes upon him without preparation (ἐσελθεῖν) as it had upon Croesus, to whom Loxias would not reveal that all that had come to pass was predestined before such time as it indeed came to pass (OT 1065, 1182, 1214).

But does an actor have the truth of what has happened in his possession simply because it has happened? He certainly cannot necessarily prove its existence subsequently. Thus, when Prexaspes, whom Cambyses enjoined to kill his brother Smerdis and who subsequently fulfilled his task, is suspected by the king of having failed to complete the mission entrusted to him, it suffices for him simply to assert that he has, without attempting to prove it in any way except to invoke the testimony of an *adynaton* that has nothing to do with the matter at hand:

‘Πρήξασπες, οὕτω μοι διέπρηξας τό τοι προσέθηκα πρήγμα;’ ὁ δὲ εἶπε· ‘ὦ δέσποτα, οὐκ ἔστι ταῦτα ἀληθέα, ὅπως κοτέ τοι Σμέρδης ἀδελφεὸς ὁ σὸς ἐπανέστηκε, οὐδὲ ὅπως τι ἐξ ἐκείνου τοῦ ἀνδρὸς νεῖκός τοι ἔσται ἢ μέγα ἢ σμικρόν· ἐγὼ γὰρ αὐτὸς ποιήσας τὰ σύ με ἐκέλευες ἔθαψά μιν χερσὶ τῆσι ἐμεωυτοῦ. εἰ μὲν νυν οἱ τεθνεῶτες ἀνεστᾶσι, προσδέκεό τοι καὶ Ἀστυάγεα τὸν Μῆδον ἐπαναστήσεσθαι· εἰ δ’ ἔστι ὥσπερ πρὸ τοῦ, οὐ μὴ τί τοι ἔκ γε

So he looked at Prexaspes and said, ‘Is this how you carried out the task I set you, Prexaspes?’ ‘Master’, Prexaspes replied, ‘the man must be lying. Your brother Smerdis has certainly not rebelled against you. He’ll never defy you over anything, big or small. I personally carried out the mission you gave me and buried the corpse with my own hands—these hands here. If the dead are rising from their graves, you should expect Astyages the Mede to rise against you as well. But if everything is as usual, you need never expect any trouble from that quarter.’

Hdt. 3.62

Because of its non-demonstrable character, reality/*aletheia* is that to which the passions aspire, inasmuch as these passions share with reality/*aletheia* both immediacy and the absence of reflective and critical distance. It is within this emotional proximity that one of the principle sources of error can be found. The actors, driven particularly by expectation (ἐλπὶς), fury (ὀργή), ardour (θυμός), insolence (ὑβρις) and fear (φόβος, δέος), are struck by the objects of their passions (πάθη) as abruptly as by the revelation of *aletheia*, to the point of making reality itself out of these objects. In the *OT*, Teiresias, in his capacity as prophet, ‘naturally has the truth within him’ (τάληθές ἐμπέφυκεν, says the leader of the chorus, 299); ‘he rears within himself the truth in all its force’ (τάληθές γὰρ ἰσχυὸν τρέφω, says Teiresias himself, 356); he affirms the ‘force of truth’ (τῆς ἀληθείας σθένος, 369). In this respect, he is able to reveal all Oedipus’ misfortunes to him (ἐκπαίνειν κακά, 329); but he refuses to do so, because they will come all the same without such revelation (341). This refusal arouses Oedipus’ fury (ὀργὴν τὴν ἐμήν 337, ὀργίζοιτ’ 339). Teiresias speaks of the ‘fury of the ardour’ (ὀργὴ θυμοῦ) that Oedipus carries to a ferocious pitch (ἀγριωτάτη). And what does Oedipus do when in the grip of such emotion? He claims to perceive better than Teiresias the reality of the past and present, and begins to privilege the vision of physical eyes over that of clairvoyance. Thus, when Teiresias delivers the meaning of Apollo’s oracle to Oedipus in spite of himself, the king retorts:

- | | |
|-----|---|
| ΟΙ. | ἧ καὶ γεγηθὼς ταῦτ’ ἀεὶ λέξειν
δοκεῖς; |
| Τε. | εἵπερ τί γ’ ἔστι τῆς ἀληθείας
σθένος. |
| ΟΙ. | ἀλλ’ ἔστι, πλὴν σοί· σοὶ δὲ τοῦτ’
οὐκ ἔστ’, ἐπεὶ
τυφλὸς τά τ’ ὥτα τὸν τε νοῦν τά
τ’ ὁμματ’ εἶ. |

OEDIPUS

Do you imagine you can always talk

Like this, and live to rejoice at it hereafter?

TEIRESIAS

Yes, if the truth has anything of strength.

OEDIPUS

It has, but not for you; it has no strength

For you because you are blind in mind and ears

As well as in your eyes.

Sophocles, *OT* 368–75

This, then, is the beginning of his error and, at the same time, of the fault that will push him to reject the divine word in order to undertake an inquiry that in the end leads him to nothing but the recognition of the truth that this word had possessed all along. The fury remains the same, but it is brought to the point of hatred (στυγήσεται 672, στύγος 673) and explosiveness (θυμός). Jocasta speaks of μῆνις (678): the vengeful wrath, the wrath of resentment—which, against all justice, brings Oedipus, who has until this point acted as the good king, to accuse Creon of perfidy and exile him, short of actually having him executed. The chorus is not deceived on this point: it recognises in his insolence (*hybris*), in which the immediacy of the passions takes the place of truth and justice, the hallmark of the tyrant:

ὕβρις φυτεύει τύραννον· ὕβρις, εἰ

πολλῶν ὑπερπλησθῆ μάταν

ἃ μὴ 'πίκαιρα μηδὲ συμφέροντα,

ἀκρότατα γέϊσ' ἀναβᾶσ'

< ἄφαρ > ἀπότομον ὥρουσεν εἰς ἀνάγκαν,

ἔνθ' οὐ ποδὶ χρησίμῳ

χρήται.

Insolence breeds the tyrant, insolence

If it is glutted with a surfeit, unseasonable, unprofitable,

Climbs to the rooftop and plunges

Sophocles, *OT* 873–6

And, later:

εἰ δέ τις ὑπέροπτα χερ—

σὶν ἢ λόγῳ πορεύεται,

Δίκας ἀφόβητος οὐδὲ

δαιμόνων ἔδη σέβων,

κακά νιν ἔλοιτο μοῖρα,

δυσπότης χάριν χλιδαῖς,

If a man walks with haughtiness²³

of hand or word and gives no heed

to Justice and the shrines of gods

despises—may an evil doom

Smite him for his ill-starred pride of heart!

Sophocles, *OT* 882–8

For an example in Herodotus we need look no further than Cambyses. Like Oedipus insofar as he wishes not his brother-in-law but his actual brother dead, the Persian king acts under the sway of the forces of jealousy (φθόνος), ardour (θυμός) and fear (δεῖσας). These make him immediately interpret a vision in his dream as the revelation that his brother will usurp his throne; or, put in another way, in their immediacy these emotions lead him to believe that the impression they give is a revelation of reality itself (3.30). But there is worse: Cambyses really does take his impulses as the route of access to truth; and, under their sway, he gives himself licence to conduct a sort of ordeal, the type of test supposed to disclose the judgement of the gods. This is how we find him in 3.34–5, when, furious (θυμωθεὶς 34; ὀργή 35) that the Persians see him as intemperate and too much given over to drinking, he proposes to reveal the truth of the matter by aiming at the heart of his adviser's son, which he makes into a shooting target:

λέγειν πρὸς τὸν Πηξιάσπεα· ‘σύ νυν μάθε [αὐτὸς] εἰ λέγουσι Πέρσαι ἀληθέα εἴτε αὐτοὶ λέγοντες ταῦτα παραφρονέουσι. εἰ μὲν γὰρ τοῦ παιδὸς τοῦ σοῦ τοῦδε ἔστεῳτος ἐν τοῖσι προθύροις βαλὼν τύχοιμι μέσης τῆς καρδίας, Πέρσαι φανέονται λέγοντες οὐδέν· ἦν δὲ αἰμάρτω, φάναι Πέρσας τε λέγειν ἀληθέα καὶ ἐμὲ μὴ σωφρονεῖν.’

‘You’ll see whether the Persians are speaking the truth,’ he said, ‘or whether in saying this they are out of their minds. There’s your son, standing on the porch. I’ll shoot at him, and if I hit him right in the heart, that will be proof that the Persians are talking nonsense, whereas if I miss, you can say that the Persians are right and that I am out of my mind.’

Hdt. 3.34

Certainly, it happens that the actors discover, by themselves, the reality that is understood as *aletheia*. But they do so at very particular moments. For instance, this can be a case of interrogating attendants and slaves by threatening them with torture. And yet, in the torture the connections of sensations, thoughts and words can be modified, even changed beyond recognition. If, as we shall see below, Herodotus and Sophocles seem to share the conception that thought falls—albeit in a very subtle fashion—under the materiality of sensation, of the kind that is usually concerned with a thinking materiality, then that sensation, exacerbated in suffering, ought to put the tortured slave in a position to think, and thereby to speak. It is within this rupturing otherness that reality is meant suddenly to become present. Even the representation of suffering suffices to produce this effect.

In a plot analogous to that which we encounter in the *OT*—in which a slave of Laius entrusts the infant Oedipus to a Corinthian herdsman so as to spare him from certain death—the Persian king and grandfather of Cyrus, who enjoined his attendant Harpages to expose his grandson, suspects that this man has entrusted the child to a shepherd who then has adopted him. Just as Oedipus does with Laius’ slave, so too does Astyages threaten the attendant with the most grievous punishments should he refuse to speak:

ΟΙ.	σὺ πρὸς χάριν μὲν οὐκ ἐρεῖς, κλαίων δ' ἐρεῖς.
ΘΕ.	μὴ δῆτα, πρὸς θεῶν, τὸν γέροντά μ' αἰκίση.
ΟΙ.	οὐχ ὥς τάχος τις τοῦδ' ἀποστρέψει χέρας.

OEDIPUS

If you'll not talk to gratify me, you
will talk with pain to urge you.

HERDSMAN

O please, sir,
Don't hurt an old man, sir.

OEDIPUS

Here, one of you,

Twist his hands behind him.

Sophocles, *OT* 1152–4

The attendant therefore relents, and Oedipus exclaims, at the end of his story:

Οἱ. ἰοὺ ἰοὺ· τὰ πάντ' ἄν ἐξήκοι σαφῆ.

O, O, O they will all come,
all come out clearly!

Sophocles, *OT* 1182

The story in Astyages' case is similarly explicit:

ὁ δὲ ἐξ ἑωυτοῦ τε ἔφη γεγονέναι καὶ τὴν τεκοῦσαν αὐτὸν εἶναι ἔτι παρ' ἑωυτῷ. Ἀστυάγης δέ μιν οὐκ εὖ βουλευέσθαι ἔφη ἐπιθυμέοντα ἐς ἀνάγκας μεγάλας ἀπικνέεσθαι, αἶμα τε λέγων ταῦτα ἐσήμαινε τοῖσι δορυφόροισι λαμβάνειν αὐτόν. ὁ δὲ ἀγόμενος ἐς τὰς ἀνάγκας οὕτω δὴ ἔφαινε τὸν ἐόντα λόγον. ἀρχόμενος δὲ ἀπ' ἀρχῆς διεξήιε τῇ ἀληθείῃ χρεώμενος καὶ κατέβαινε ἐς λιτάς τε καὶ συγγνώμην ἑωυτῷ.

The Herdsman replied that the boy was his own son and that the boy's mother was still with him. Astyages told him that he was stupid to want to bring terrible punishment down on himself, and at the same time he gave his guards the signal to seize the man. As he was being led away to torture, he began to tell the truth. Starting from the beginning, he gave an honest and thorough account of what had happened and finally begged and beseeched Astyages to pardon him.²⁴

Hdt. 1.116

Inquiry

The second route of access to reality is that of inquiry (*historein*). Inquiry uses as its instruments not only *gnome* (judgement), but the faculties of perception of *opsis* (sight) and *akoe* (hearing): that is, the ability to hear stories in circulation.²⁵ These two senses had already been associated with one another by Heraclitus.²⁶

These are the means by which information is gathered, depending on the degree of physical remove from the event: information gathered through autopsy, i.e. by the historian having witnessed the event himself; the tales gathered through hearing eyewitness

testimonies of the event; the stories of stories that supposedly take their origin in an eyewitness testimony, more or less removed in the chain of transmission; and lastly—a further broadening of the field of information available—the stories gathered from those living in the locality of the event, who, without truly being reliable eyewitnesses, could nevertheless be acknowledged to have been witnesses of some sort. We might call this local rumour.²⁷

The task of inquiry thus consists of bringing oneself closer and closer to the point of initial *opsis*. The best example of such a process is provided in book two of Herodotus' *Histories*, in the inquiry on the sources of the Nile (2.29–32). Having followed the river up to the 'land of the Deserters' by means of the account told by 'certain men', Herodotus wishes to learn what is still further upstream. For this he listens to the Cimmerians, who, when they had gone to consult the oracle of Ammon, themselves heard the claims of Etearchus, king of the Ammonians. This Etearchus presented himself as the repository of a story told by the Nasamones, 'a Libyan people who live on the borders of Syrte and the land to the east'. But the Nasamones, in their turn, report nothing except the tale of young men of their race who had been sent to explore these lands. In the end, these young men supposedly saw personally a great river populated with crocodiles at the end of their voyage, which Etearchus holds must be the Nile.

In all other cases, it is striking to note that Herodotus chooses almost exclusively to derive his information about the events concerning each place from the people who actually inhabit it: the Spartans for Sparta, the Argives for Argos, the Persians, even, for matters relevant to their own history, and so on.

In this respect, Oedipus proves himself to be very Herodotean: he insists upon questioning in order to gather stories and to reach the initial eyewitness testimony, according to a progressive process of discovery of the real in contrast with the immediacy of revelation proper to *aletheia*, as mentioned earlier. He demands of Creon, who reports the death of Laius at the hands of an ambush of brigands,

ΟΙ.	οὐδ' ἄγγελός τις οὐδὲ συμπράκτωρ ὁδοῦ κατεῖδ' ὅτου τις ἐκμαθὼν ἐχρήσατ' ἄν.
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OEDIPUS

Was there no messenger, no fellow traveler

who saw what happened? Such a one might tell something of use.

Sophocles, *OT* 116–17

Elsewhere, he demands precision in the chain of information from the chorus leader, who alludes to inconsistent words (κωφά) and to ancient words (παλαί' ἔπη):

Oι. τὰ ποῖα ταῦτα; πάντα γὰρ σκοπῶ
λόγον.
Χο. θανεῖν ἐλέχθη πρὸς τινῶν
ὁδοιπόρων.
Οι. ἤκουσα καὶ γὰρ τὸν δ' ἰδόντ'
οὐδεὶς ὁραῖ.

OEDIPUS

What is it? I look at every rumor.

CHORUS LEADER

It was said that he was killed by certain wayfarers.

OEDIPUS

I hear that, too, but no one sees who did it.

Sophocles, *OT* 291–3

But it is during his interrogation of the Corinthian shepherd that the verb *historein* most frequently occurs (1144, 1150, 1155, 1165), and here Oedipus' method of inquiry approximates most closely with Herodotus'. What the hero wants is to see and, if nothing else, to listen to those who have seen, or come closest to the act of seeing. He demands to see (ἰδεῖν) the herdsman of Laius (1045), of whom he demands to know whether he still lives; and when the Corinthian responds, 'you who live here (οὐπιχώριοι) would know that best' (1046), Oedipus begins an inquiry with the chorus, who on this occasion represent the *epichorioi* in question:

Oι. ἦ καὶ στ' ἔτι ζῶν οὗτος, ὥστ' ἰδεῖν
ἐμέ;
Αγ. ὑμεῖς γ' ἄριστ' εἰδεῖτ' ἂν
οὐπιχώριοι.
Οι. ἔστιν τις ὑμῶν τῶν παρεστώτων
πέλας,
ὅστις κάτοιιδε τὸν βοτῆρ' ὃν
ἐννέπει,

εἴτ' οὖν ἐπ' ἀγρῶν εἴτε κἀνθάδ'
εἰσιδών.

OEDIPUS

Is he alive

Still, so that I could see him?

MESSENGER

You who live here

Would know that best.

OEDIPUS

Do any of you here

Know of this shepherd whom he speaks about

In town or in the fields?

Sophocles, *OT* 1047–50

Yet the feature that characterises the reality reached by the inquiry when it is left to its own forces, in addition to the progressiveness already mentioned, is the fact that this reality is at best merely a reality of consensus. It is not a reality that imposes itself absolutely as a form of divine *aletheia*, but rather as a shared *opinion* (δόξα, δοκεῖν). The ‘inquirer’ himself never forms a conclusion, or anything but an opinion (δόξα) of the truth when he gives his own view; whereas throughout his work, he calls upon the audience to choose who or what convinces them the best.²⁸ His only protection against lies and error resides in the number of those who recognise the truth as he does—a truth/reality of the lawcourts or the assembly to which Plato would be so opposed.²⁹

But Herodotus can explore to the boundaries of the mechanisms that lead him to such a reality and show all its workings, whereas Oedipus cannot. His inquiry, in effect, takes a route of coincidence, directed by that which has been previously revealed. It does not find truth; it merely comes to confirm that which has already been posed as such. In other words, this inquiry does not know reality, but rather *recognises* it in all senses of the term with the help of time, which knows all.³⁰

Connecting the Two Routes of Access to Reality

However, the fact that the *Histories* of Herodotus and the *OT* each attests two routes of access to reality, the one and the other—notably the reality of what has happened in the past—does not mean that they organise their accounts in the same fashion. This difference of organisation is one of the factors in their difference in genre.

The Tragedy and the ‘Tragic Episodes’ of the Histories

One might say that the tragedy of Sophocles as well as the stories devoted to tyrants and those which can be called ‘tragic’ in the *Histories*, place revelation in competition with inquiry, or at least with strictly human means of understanding.

The confrontation in Sophocles is frontal. Oedipus launches his first attack at Teiresias:

ἐπεί, φέρ' εἰπέ, ποῦ σὺ μάντις εἶ σαφής;
πῶς οὐχ, ὅθ' ἡ ράψωδὸς ἐνθάδ' ἦν κύων,
ἠϋδας τι τοῖσδ' ἀστοῖσιν ἐκλυτήριον;
καίτοι τό γ' αἴνιγμ' οὐχὶ τοῦπιόντος ἦν
ἀνδρὸς διειπεῖν, ἀλλὰ μαντείας ἔδει·
ἦν οὔτ' ἀπ' οἰωνῶν σὺ προῦφάνης ἔχων
οὔτ' ἐκ θεῶν του γνωτόν· ἀλλ' ἐγὼ μολῶν,
ὁ μὴδὲν εἰδῶς Οἰδίπους, ἔπαυσά νιν,
γνώμη κυρήσας οὐδ' ἀπ' οἰωνῶν μαθών.

For tell me, where have you seen clear, Teiresias,

With your prophetic mind? When the dark singer,

The Sphinx, was in your country, did you speak

Word of deliverance to these citizens?

Yet solving the riddle then was not the province

of a chance comer, it was a prophet's task,

and plainly you had no such gift of prophecy

from birds nor otherwise from any god

to glean a word of knowledge. But I came,

Mine was no knowledge got from birds.

Oedipus is mistaken here not only in showing that, in his view, divination is something that can be learned, whereas in reality it only makes the diviner into a receptacle of revelation, but also in opposing Teiresias' fruitless attempts at learning with the—somehow more natural—force of his own *gnome*. This is not, as what follows will show, a true opposition between the two modes of understanding of the real.

Oedipus then directly attacks the oracle of Apollo Pythios, when he learns that Polybus of Corinth, who he believes to be his father, has died of old age and not at his hand. So he exclaims at the address of Jocasta:

ΟΙ. φεῦ φεῦ, τί δῆτ' ἄν, ὤ γύναι,
σκοποῖτό τις
τὴν Πυθόμαντιν ἐστίαν, ἥ τοὺς
ἄνω
κλάζοντας ὄρνις;

To the birds screaming overhead?

Later (971–2) he speaks of oracles being ‘worthless’ (ἄξι’ οὐδενός). His error therefore consists in not questioning whether Polybus truly is his biological father, although he knows the rumours that have long drawn into question his own blood relationship with him. He prefers to believe that he is yet again facing an enigma, and to suppose that he must take the verb ‘to kill’ as a hyperbole: he had simply ‘weakened’ his father by making him feel the pain of his absence.

But it is Jocasta who enjoins him the most clearly, without knowing where she is leading him, to abandon the oracular response in favour of inquiry. When Oedipus reports to her that Creon has accused him of

the murder of Laius, she asks him, in short, as a perfect inquirer herself, ‘Of his own knowledge or on information?’ (αὐτὸς ξυνειδῶς ἢ μαθὼν ἄλλου πάρα; 704)—and then encourages him to ‘learn that human beings have no part in the craft of prophecy’ (μάθ’ οὐνεκ’ ἐστί σοι βρότειον οὐδὲν μαντικῆς ἔχον τέχνης, 708–9). And she later responds, in truly Herodotean fashion, to Oedipus when he asks her whether Laius was killed by a group of brigands or by a single man, that ‘for everyone in the city heard it—not just I alone’ (πόλις γὰρ ἤκουσ’, οὐκ ἐγὼ μόνη, τάδε, 850); and then concludes:

ὥστ’ οὐχὶ μαντείας γ’ ἂν οὔτε τῆδ’ ἐγὼ

βλέψαμι’ ἂν οὐνεκ’ οὔτε τῆδ’ ἂν ὕστερον.

As far as prophecy

Goes, henceforward I won’t look to the right

Nor to the left hand either.

Sophocles, *OT* 858–9

As for the tyrants in the *Histories*, they reject divine or quasi-divine revelations less by actively denouncing them than by trying to understand what they reveal only with the limited means of their human faculties and insight.

The king of the Medes, Astyages, has two visions in a dream, both of which he reports to the Magi. They announce that the son of his daughter Mandane must be king in his place (1.107–8). In the meantime, Mandane has married a Persian man of such high status that Cyrus, their son, represents a threat. Astyages therefore reacts in the same way as Laius. He orders an attendant to go and expose the child. But like Laius’ attendant, this man instead entrusts the child to a herdsman who will save and rear him. Thus Astyages loses his throne, and his kingdom passes under Persian dominion.

Croesus (1.46) claims to be able to check the veracity of certain oracles by assuring that he has complete and exclusive knowledge of the fact about which he consulted them—that is, by somehow granting the possibility of verifying what the god has predicted to the human consultant. In order to do this, Croesus develops and keeps secret a situation so artificial and incongruous that it is impossible to interpret either in a succession of indiscretions or by logical deduction. He cuts up and boils a turtle and a lamb in a brazen cauldron, covered with a bronze lid, and asks of the god what it is. The oracle of Delphi finds the answer with ease. But Croesus’ error

consists in extrapolating, from his own ability to laboriously gain mastery of an insignificant situation, the power to know without trouble a more complex truth—in this case, what will happen to him and what truthful but ambiguous oracles announce about his situation.

Cambyases, for his part, wishes to put the divine nature of the Apis bull to the test by making trial of its corporeality. He ends up wounding and killing the manifestation. The error is a double one. First, it pertains to the premise of his reasoning: gods do not have bodies. It follows that, if one can wound the Apis bull, and if it dies of this wound, then he surely must not be a god. But this kind of reasoning is to ascribe the true nature of an epiphany too little value. It can certainly have a body, set into motion by the gods. Secondly, the presence of the divine or at least of the sacred is not of the same order as Cambyases ascribes to it, as Herodotus explains later (3.28). What is sacred for a population is laws and customs (*nomoi*), and any attack on them is a transgression that will in any case be punished. The madness of the king perhaps represents this retribution, as the Egyptians think; but in any case his death, caused by a gangrenous wound to the leg, makes him a victim of the Egyptian god he had flouted and killed in the same manner.

Lastly, Xerxes wishes to know whether the vision that descends upon him in his sleep and that enjoins him to lead an expedition against Greece is divine or not. For this, he devises a sort of test for his own dream: he asks Artabanus to take his place first on the throne, then in his bed after having exchanged clothes, in order to verify whether the same vision will appear to him. Artabanus—who for his part and in truly Hippocratic fashion reduces the dream to simple physical and human process—agrees simply because he does not expect any such experience to take place. Yet the dream appears to him, and worries him sufficiently to convince Xerxes to abandon the expedition (7.17–18). He thus recognises that the Persians are impelled by the divine will (τοῦ θεοῦ παραδίδοντος, 7.18), but is mistaken about the identity of the victim of the disaster. He concludes—quite wrongly—that it is the Greeks who will submit to catastrophe. Thus again competition between the different modes of understanding turns out to be to the detriment of humankind.

Both in tragedy and in the episodes within the *Histories* that may be called ‘tragic’ the end proves equally disastrous: a miserable exile for Oedipus, and enslavement, defeat or death for other tyrants.

Historia

The *historia* that Herodotus undertakes proposes, for its part, an entirely different configuration. Far from placing understanding through revelation and ‘historical’ understanding in competition or conflict, *historia* organises them in a complementary manner.

For Herodotus as ‘inquirer’, the use of *akoe* that has just relayed *opsis* includes the task of collecting statements that the informants are expected to give regarding oracles. If certain examples lead one to think that the inquirer has been able to consult collections such as those of Bacis, Musaeus or Laius, the oracular tradition is nevertheless for the most part attained by way of oral or written mediation. This is to say that revelations, as one type of collected *logoi* among others, are integral to the construction of understanding, but do not have a particular epistemological status. Another feature that makes them part of the flood of other *logoi* is the fact that they now constitute *post eventum* information: they are no longer predictions about the future, as had been the case for the actors originally involved in the moment of revelation.

In this sense, Herodotus makes himself very ‘Sophoclean’ in placing oracles in the position of being elucidated by time itself, regardless of the position of the actors involved. Recall the words of the chorus: ‘Time who sees all has found you out against your will’ (ἐφηϋρέ σ’ ἄκονθ’ ὁ πάνθ’ ὀρῶν χρόνος), referring to everything Oedipus has done and is. Oracles—such as they are presented in the *Histories*—are versified and most commonly presented in the form of puzzles related to events to come, even if these tales are *post eventum* from the point of view of narrators and informants. Epigraphical texts, however, report the prescriptions of cults and responses that figured already in the question posed, being neither versified nor ambiguous. This invites us to believe that Herodotus’ informants (one community or other) and the written sources to which he had access (e.g. foundation stories, lives of illustrious men, memorialisations of important events) had already elaborated this material, or even that Herodotus himself contributed to such an elaboration. The fact remains that the ‘(partly) divine ordainment’ of events in his history is not simply a literary artifice, and that it is combined with the actions of men so as to give form to the reality of the human world.³¹

It is thus that he delivers an eloquent tribute to the veracity of the oracle of Bacis when he cites its prediction of the outcome of the battle of Salamis (8.77). In 7.20, he reproaches the Euboeans for not having taken into account another oracle of Bacis, which announced

to them the loss of their flocks, and elsewhere in book seven, he affirms that it had been ordained by an oracle that all of Attica would fall to the power of the Persians.

In conclusion, it seems that, by sharing the same view of history (*Geschichte*)—in which both divine and human agency are implicated in the course of events—Sophocles and Herodotus both operate with two forms of relationship to knowledge. This knowledge arises from the same data and the same modes of information, but occurs in two temporally and cognitively different ways: immediate revelation and inquiry over the course of time.

The Sensory Presence in the World

Throughout the *Histories* and the *Oedipus Rex*, we therefore deal with the two same routes of access to the past—revelation and inquiry—as well as two different ways of articulating them. But beyond this, the two works offer parallel representations of the physico-psychological mechanisms by means of which the sensory perception of reality operates, and the dangers that they pose. It is indeed a way of knowing the world, and in particular the past—to see, hear and judge; but it is also a risk, even if like Herodotus one seeks to mitigate that risk through respect for the oracles. But what is the nature of this risk?

Oedipus Rex

Oedipus, after (as he says) all has become clear to him, is a case in point. His action consists in blinding himself and lamenting his inability to render himself deaf at the same time—that is, to lose the fundamental instruments of inquiry. And in doing so, what does he say about these instruments of inquiry and the manner in which they are represented and perceived? Let us turn to lines 1386–90 of the *OT*:

ἥκιστα γ'· ἀλλ' εἰ τῆς ἀκουούσης ἔτ' ἦν
πηγῆς δι' ὧτων φραγμός, οὐκ ἂν ἐσχόμην
τὸ μάποκλιῆσαι τοῦμόν ἄθλιον δέμας,
ἔν' ἣ τυφλός τε καὶ κλύων μηδέν· τὸ γὰρ
τῇν φροντίδ' ἔξω τῶν κακῶν οἰκεῖν γλυκύ.

If there were a means to choke the Fountain

Of hearing I would not have stayed my hand

From locking up my miserable carcass,

Seeing and hearing nothing; for³² it is sweet

To keep our thoughts out of the range of hurt.

Sophocles, *OT* 1386–90

What can be recognised here is a conception, shared by Presocratic philosophy,³³ according to which thought is the material consequence of sensation. These sensations are understood as the combination of external, material elements giving rise to the senses (fire for sight, air for hearing) with the same or opposite element present in the organ of the corresponding sense (fire in the eye, air in the ear). Elements thus received in the body by way of the sensory organs (or from time to time and more particularly by way of pores) become thereby more subtle without at any point losing their material nature; and this in order to constitute the sense that is in some sense superior, that of thought (here *phrontis*, since it denotes thought susceptible to becoming worry or concern; *phronein* or *gnome* elsewhere). Hence, then, the importance of *gar* in the above text, which serves to underline the causal line of continuity between the materiality of sensation and thought.³⁴

But it ought also to be noted here that Oedipus does more than merely wish to punish himself with respect to the same faculties by which he sinned in making himself an inquirer, because of his disrespect for oracular revelations. He dreams aloud of a body/fortress closed from the outside, and that would then not be penetrated by way of his sensory organs. This is to approach, in a very particular way, the designation of misfortune that elsewhere in tragedy is often called *sumphore*. At 1143, Creon speaks of misfortune as *chreia*, need, that is to say in precise terms a lack of self-sufficiency of the sort that enables one to live, breathing life (*psyche*) without dependence upon an external factor one cannot control.

The *Histories*

But it is in Herodotus, first and foremost, that this representation is the best attested. We have it again in 3.40. Amasis, observing the unalloyed good fortune (εὐτυχίη) of Polycrates and worrying that it risks unleashing divine jealousy, enjoins the tyrant to ‘bring some grief to his soul’ in some way (μάλιστα τὴν ψυχὴν ἄλγειν) (that is, to inflict pain that will touch his living/breathing being: *psyche*). This should serve as an attempt to offset his objective happiness through

personal pain, and thus to introduce equilibrium and measure that, in accordance with a Hippocratic conception of the relationship between the internal and external body, are appropriate for the human condition:

σύ νυν ἐμοὶ πειθόμενος ποιήσον πρὸς τὰς εὐτυχίας τοιάδε. Φροντίσας τὸ ἂν εὖρης ἐόν τοι πλείστου ἄξιον καὶ ἐπ' ὧ σὺ ἀπολομένῳ μάλιστα τὴν ψυχὴν ἀλγήσεις, τοῦτο ἀπόβαλε οὕτω ὅκως μηκέτι ἦξει ἐς ἀνθρώπους. Ἦν τε μὴ ἐναλλάξ ἤδη τῷ τούτου αἰ εὐτυχίαι τοι τῇσι πάθῃσι προσπίπτωσι, τρόπῳ τῷ ἐξ ἐμέο ὑποκειμένῳ ἀκέο.

So please do as I suggest. In the face of your success I think you should decide what your most valuable possession is (ἐόν τοι πλείστου ἄξιον)—that is, the one whose loss would bring the most pain to your soul (μάλιστα τὴν ψυχὴν ἀλγήσεις)—and throw it away, making sure that it will never reappear among mortal men. If from then on your good luck (αἰ εὐτυχίαι) does not meet with varied disasters (πάθῃσι), continue to try to cure it in the way I have suggested.

Hdt. 3.40³⁵

And how is this pain achieved? Strictly speaking—and in a way quite surprising to us—it is achieved through the sensation of satiation, of disgust at being too sated, which affects the body and soul. It is the opposite of the lack attested in the *OT*. When Herodotus reports that Polycrates searches among his treasures for the object that would ‘cause his soul the greatest distress’ (ἐπ' ᾧ ἂν μάλιστα τὴν ψυχὴν ἀσηθείη, 3.41), he uses the verb ἀσάομαι (to be fully satiated, to be disgusted by food), derived from ἄση (satiation, disgust, nausea brought on by what one has consumed in excess):

ταῦτα ἐπιλεξάμενος ὁ Πολυκράτης καὶ νόῳ λαβὼν ὥς οἱ εὖ ὑπετίθετο [ὁ] Ἀμασις, ἐδίζητο ἐπ' ᾧ ἂν μάλιστα τὴν ψυχὴν ἀσηθείη ἀπολομένῳ τῶν κειμηλίων, διζήμενος δ' εὗρισκε τόδε.

When Polycrates read this letter and realized the extent of Amasis' goodwill towards him, he thought long and hard about which of his precious possessions it would most nauseate him to lose, and he came to the following conclusion.

Hdt. 3.41

We know that the tyrant divests himself of a ring that he loves. It is in this way, the text says, that he ‘puts misfortune to the test’ (δυσφορῇ χρᾶσθαι). We know what happens. A divine event occurs: the jewellery returns to its owner. Amasis immediately breaks all ties with his friend. He did this, Herodotus says (3.43),

ἵνα μὴ συντυχίης δεινῆς τε καὶ μεγάλης Πολυκράτεια καταλαβούσης αὐτὸς ἀλγήσειε τὴν ψυχὴν ὥς περὶ ξείνου ἀνδρός.

so that he would not suffer as much pain in his soul as he would have done at

Thus, in the cases in which *sumphore* takes place—that is to say a blow, generally of divine origin, that affects human beings externally—the text gives the words required to understand the disturbance of what we call emotions as an indivisible psychic and somatic phenomenon of imbalance that must be corrected. To the evil that the gods are holding in reserve for him, Polycrates must respond with a compensatory evil: to bring himself the disgust that provokes the kind of satiation in which his good fortune permits him to consume, be that a miraculous fish or, more broadly, the territories he conquers or the threads of hospitality he weaves. The happiness that we experience in times of prosperity is a yearning for things, and the misery that provokes the blow is the absence of appetite that can be sated. The important issue is finding the correct balance; but, as the tale seems to tell, this is scarcely easy.

We can thus understand the result of the ‘theory of happiness’ that Solon delivers to Croesus in book one (32, 39–48), which places man, when found alone, on the same level as a self-sufficient region:

τὰ πάντα μέν νυν ταῦτα συλλαβεῖν ἄνθρωπον ἐόντα ἀδύνατόν ἐστι, ὥσπερ
χώρῃ οὐδεμία καταρκέει πάντα ἐωυτῇ παρέχουσα, ἀλλὰ ἄλλο μὲν ἔχει,
ἐτέρου δὲ ἐπιδέεται· ἡ δὲ ἂν τὰ πλεῖστα ἔχῃ, αὕτη ἀρίστη. ὥς δὲ καὶ
ἀνθρώπου σῶμα ἐν οὐδὲν αὐταρκές ἐστι· τὸ μὲν γὰρ ἔχει, ἄλλου δὲ ἐνδεές
ἐστι· ὃς δ' ἂν αὐτῶν πλεῖστα ἔχων διατελέῃ καὶ ἔπειτα τελευτήσῃ
εὐχαρίστως τὸν βίον, οὗτος παρ' ἐμοὶ τὸ οὐνομα τοῦτο, ὦ βασιλεῦ, δίκαιός
ἐστι φέρεσθαι.

Now, it is impossible for a mere mortal to have all these blessings at the same time, just as no country is entirely self-sufficient; any given country has some things, but lacks others, and the best country is the one which has the most. By the same token, no one person is self-sufficient; he has some things, but lacks others. The person who has and retains more of these advantages than others, and then dies well, my lord, is the one who, in my opinion, deserves the description in question.

In sum, happiness is here defined as a form of autonomy of the production of sustenance with neither lack nor need, which, on the model of territorial autarchy, exempts man from dependence upon the outside world by placing him in a perfect equilibrium of having and spending. However, this perfect equilibrium and its corollary—immunity in the face of external attacks—seem almost entirely out of reach.

Oedipus Rex and the *Histories* therefore seem to attest to a moment of questioning of the human capacity to understand reality—in particular the reality of the past—and do so by different but related routes. Inquiry by itself does not lead to *aletheia*: it constitutes a sort of reality that has the fragility of consensus, while incontestable truth can only come through revelation. This questioning is coupled with a form of apprehension: left to their own sensory capacities and their thoughts, the actors conceive of themselves as exposed, without protection, to the unbalancing intrusion of the outside world. The time has not yet come to maintain, as Plato, a dianoetic aptitude that may allow access to the truth without reliance upon the capacities of seers, prophets or philosopher-mages, nor upon the *historiai* that never go back to the primary, intelligent causes—but upon the dialectician, who through use of *logos* knows how to keep the senses and sensitive thought at a distance.

Notes

- 1 Paper translated by Christopher Burden-Strevens.
- 2 See among others the monographs of Edmunds (2014) and Bettini (2005); also Segal (2001, 24–48).
- 3 For a general overview of *historia* as a mode of understanding, see Darbo-Peschanski (2007) and for this same mode of understanding in Herodotus, Darbo-Peschanski (2013).
- 4 Before examining what the *Histories* contributes to our understanding of the relationship between Herodotus and Athens, Strasburger (1955) argues that the existence of a ‘Periclean Circle’, to which the most eminent artistic and intellectual talents of the time would have belonged, belongs to an ideal image of Classical Athens that divides both scholars and lay-people, but which is ultimately not borne out by a proper examination of the sources. For such an examination see Jacoby (1913, col. 226f.). More recently, Azoulay (2010, 110–13; 2014, 91–3) prefers to see in this ‘circle’ the result of propaganda by the political opponents of the *strategos*, who attempted to denounce his aristocratic, not to say tyrannical, sponsoring of such talent.
- 5 Plutarch preserves testimony of an epigramme from Sophocles to Herodotus (*An seni respublica gerenda sit* 3): ‘Sophocles, at the age of 50, composed his verses in honour of Herodotus’. Strasburger (1955) argues that the respect felt for Herodotus by Sophocles must have been mutual.
- 6 Barbarian kings or tyrants, but also the Egyptian priests.
- 7 All translations of Sophocles in this paper are from Grene and Lattimore (Sophocles 2013).
- 8 Christ (1994) discusses tyrant inquirers in the *Histories*, but argues for a rivalry between Herodotus and his ruler characters where part of Herodotus’ purpose of writing about them was to demonstrate his own intellectual and ethical superiority as well as the authority of his own *historia*. I am doubtful of such a psychology of rivalry and intentions and do not believe in a game of resemblances and differences internal to the *Histories*.

- 9 Lévi-Strauss (2009, 560).
- 10 ‘[P]our passer à l’état de mythe, il faut précisément qu’une création ne reste pas individuelle et perde, au cours de cette promotion, l’essentiel des facteurs dus à la probabilité qui la compénétraient au départ et qu’on pouvait attribuer au tempérament, au talent, à l’imagination et aux expériences personnelles de son auteur.’
- 11 On this point in particular see Edmunds (2014), Bettini (2005), Segal (2001).
- 12 Edmunds (2014, 4) finds these motifs listed in Aarne and Thomson (1981).
- 13 See Edmunds (2014, 4f.).
- 14 To cite only the most recent treatments of this theme: Davies (1982; 1991); Pucci (1991); Kitzinger (1993); Serra (1999; 2003); Burian (2009); Kovacs (2009); Sommerstein (2011).
- 15 On this point cf. Edmunds (2014, 40–41), who defends the mutual independence of the three plays.
- 16 Lévi-Strauss (1962, 26, 126).
- 17 Lévi-Strauss (1962, 26–47).
- 18 According to Edmunds (2014), the blinding does not seem to have been securely linked to an agent or a precise moment of the chronology of the myth, but is nonetheless mentioned in Aeschylus, *Septem* 772–84.
- 19 ἡδὺ μὲν πυνθάνεσθαι ἄνδρα φίλον καὶ ξεῖνον εὖ πρήσσοντα, ἐμοὶ δὲ αἰσαὶ μεγάλαι εὐτυχίαι οὐκ ἀρέσκουσι, τὸ θεῖον ἐπισταμένω ὥς ἔστι φθονερόν. ‘Although I am glad to hear that a man who is a guest-friend and ally is prospering, I worry about your remarkable good fortune, because I know that the gods are jealous of success.’
- 20 All translations of Herodotus are by R. Waterfield (Herodotus 1998).
- 21 τῷ δὲ Κροίσῳ ἔσπεῳτι ἐπὶ τῆς πυρῆς ἐσελθεῖν, καίπερ ἐν κακῷ ἔοντι τοσοῦτῳ, τὸ τοῦ Σόλωνος, ὥς οἱ εἶη σὺν θεῷ εἰρημένον, τὸ ‘μηδένα εἶναι τῶν ζώντων ὀλβιον’. ‘Meanwhile (the story goes), although Croesus’ situation up on top of the pyre was desperate, his mind turned to Solon’s saying that no one who is still alive is happy, and it occurred to him how divinely inspired Solon had been to say that.’
- 22 In the same vein one might think of the tyrannical man in Plato, *Republic* 8.578a10–13, whose soul is made mad by appetites and desires (ἐν ἀνδρὶ δὲ ἡγεῖ τὰ τοιαῦτα ἐν ἄλλῳ τινὶ πλεῖω εἶναι ἢ ἐν τῷ μαινομένῳ ὑπὸ ἐπιθυμιῶν τε καὶ ἐρώτων τούτῳ τῷ τυραννικῷ).
- 23 *Huperopta*: ‘who looks down from above’. Again we see the theme of the gaze misused.
- 24 Again we note the vocabulary of light and appearance.
- 25 In Hdt. 2.99, *historie* appears in a list alongside *opsis*, *akoe* and *gnome*. I have suggested elsewhere (Darbo-Peschanski 2013) that we take this as an indication that Herodotean *historie* is greater than the exercise of its three faculties and involves a different approach to information once it has been collected and evaluated. It is about the organisation of the final judgement, which is given over to the readers of the work.
- 26 Heraclitus 22 B101a D–K; Hdt. 1.8.10.
- 27 The source referred to as the ἐπιχῳριοὶ and the stories (λόγοι) that one can hear (ἀκοῆ) from them.
- 28 Hdt. 2.123 (on Rhampsinites, one of their ancient kings, who the Egyptians

believe to have become a judge in the Underworld): ‘Anyone who finds such things credible can make of these Egyptian stories what he wishes. My job, throughout this account, is simply to record whatever I am told by each of my sources.’ 3.122 (on the death of Polycrates of Samos): ‘These are the two reasons mentioned for Polycrates’ death; anyone can choose which of them to believe.’ 4.42 (on the story of the Phoenicians who claim that, during their journey in Libya, the sun was on their right): ‘They made a claim which I personally do not believe, although someone else might—that as they were sailing around Libya they had the sun on their right’.

- 29 Politics (in a democratic city or other assembly regime) has as a semblance (εἰδωλον, *Gorgias* 463e4) of one branch of itself the rhetoric that is in itself only a practice and a routine, that is, an activity void of a proper object and incapable of attaining its goals, two traits that, for their part, define the science or knowledge of the truth.
- 30 OT 1213.
- 31 For oracles in Herodotus and some relevant bibliography see Darbo-Peschanski (1987, 74–82).
- 32 ‘For’ has been added to Grene’s translation. It is often forgotten by translators, but it will be seen from the discussion that it is of crucial importance.
- 33 For a study of the correspondences between Aeschylus and Presocratic thought see Seaford (2013). For the approach to tragedy that sees it in the context of archaic thought see the volume Cairns (2013). For *historia*, Herodotus and the Presocratics see also Darbo-Peschanski (2007, 82–91 and 132–71).
- 34 For Empedocles see Theophrastus, *Peri aistheseos* 1–2 and 7–25. For Diogenes of Apollonius (and perhaps Anaximenes): 64 B4 D–K. For Heraclitus: 22 B 104 D–K. For Democritus, later in time: 68 B11 D–K.
- 35 The translation of this and the following two passages is modified from Waterfield.

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6 Fictional Truth and Factual Truth in Herodotus

*Anthony Ellis*¹

Herodotus' relationship with truth and fiction has been contested since antiquity: was he 'father of history', as Cicero called him, or 'father of lies', as Juan Luis Vives claimed in the early sixteenth century, drawing on two millennia of strident criticism of Herodotus?² This polarity has done much to obscure the role of 'fictional' narratives as a vehicle for philosophical and theological mediation in the *Histories*;³ fiction as moral and philosophical truth, in other words, rather than as lies.⁴ Despite the importance of this latter type of truth—creative 'fiction'—in the *Histories*, Herodotus clearly sometimes conceives of fiction as factual untruth, and claims on a number of occasions that his own work has a greater factual reliability than that of other authors—most famously Homer—who allowed themselves poetic licence. In what follows, I look at how Herodotus adopts different narratorial personas that implicitly or explicitly alert the reader to the different types of 'truth' that the *Histories* contain, and how these different types of truth interact with one another.

Building upon the suggestions of Marincola, Griffiths, de Jong and de Bakker, I shall argue that Herodotus makes full, creative and repeated use of two quite distinct narrative personas that derive from different narrative traditions.⁵ The first is a 'mimetic' style, employed by an omniscient, Homeric-style narrator; the second is an 'empirical' style, employed by an epistemologically cautious, Hippocratic-style narrator, who remains a very human inquirer. These narratorial postures appear, on the face of it, quite incompatible and, as we shall see, they are generally employed for different literary purposes.

Numerous surveys have looked in detail at Herodotus' narratorial persona and narrative style, but in practice most focus on only one of the two personas, while explicitly or implicitly acknowledging that Herodotus sometimes 'departs' from the persona or style under examination (or alternatively suggesting that they are studying one such 'departure'). We thus have excellent accounts of Herodotus' innovative insistence on sources and unusually audible narratorial 'voice',⁶ his stress on autopsy,⁷ as well as his use of the structural and

stylistic features of Attic tragedy,⁸ and Homeric epic.⁹ Little has been said about the questions addressed in this paper: how Herodotus' split personas interact, how we are to explain their use,¹⁰ and finally what notions of 'truth' and 'fiction' are associated with each.

I divide my discussion into four parts, of which the first two aim to flesh out our understanding of the literary affiliations of each Herodotean persona. The first part examines Herodotus' 'historical' persona (which we might equally term 'scientific' or 'empirical'): from an analysis of the first section of the Egyptian *logos* (2.1–120) I compile a list of techniques by which Herodotus stresses the superiority of his factual knowledge, and look at the notion of 'truth' that emerges from such narratives. The second part examines the persona assumed by the narrator in the 'warner dialogues' between sages and prosperous monarchs who are about to suffer a dramatic reversal of fortune. Here we encounter different techniques and language, by means of which, I argue, Herodotus crafts a different type of truth. The third part looks at these distinct narratorial personas in the light of Aristotle's claims about *historia* and *poiesis*—a late but useful source for these genre distinctions—and considers some explanations that have been proposed for variation in Herodotus' narratorial style. The fourth part discusses several passages where the distinction between these styles and personas breaks down, asking what this tells us about Herodotus' use of sources, and his literary affiliations more generally.

The 'Historical' Persona

Herodotus mentions no inspirational muse in his proem, an omission long viewed as an implicit challenge to Homer, who begins his *Iliad* by invoking the divine muse.¹¹ The Persian and Phoenician stories of woman theft with which the *Histories* open are left to one side, and Herodotus announces that he will take a different line of inquiry:

ταῦτα μὲν νυν Πέρσαι τε καὶ Φοίνικες λέγουσι. Ἐγὼ δὲ περὶ μὲν τούτων οὐκ ἔρχομαι ἐρέων ὥς οὕτως ἢ ἄλλως κως ταῦτα ἐγένετο, τὸν δὲ οἶδα αὐτὸς πρῶτον ὑπάρξαντα ἀδίκων ἔργων ἐς τοὺς Ἕλληνας, τοῦτον σημήνας προβήσομαι ἐς τὸ πρόσω τοῦ λόγου, ὁμοίως μικρὰ καὶ μεγάλα ἄστεα ἀνθρώπων ἐπεξιών.

This is what the Persians and Phoenicians say. I, however, do not come saying that these things happened this way, or any other way; rather, after indicating the man whom I myself know to have first started unjust deeds against the Greeks, I shall move forward in my logos, coming alike upon the small and the great cities of men.

By this Herodotus announces that it is his own knowledge—derived, as we shall see, from the judicious analysis of sources—that will provide the substance of his narrative.

The Egyptian *logos* of book two (along with the Scythian *logos* of book four) has long been considered an extreme instance of Herodotus' tendency towards polemical and scientific narrative, and it serves well as a template for a particular narratological tendency in the *Histories*.¹² This style might be characterised as having two basic aspects: an abundance of comments pertaining to sources and a number of stylistic features by which the very audible narrator guides the reader through the narrative.¹³ To begin with the former, the narrator often represents himself in the act of inquiry, seeking information and describing his travels:¹⁴

θέλων δὲ τούτων περὶ σαφές τι εἰδέναι ἐξ ὧν οἶόν τε ἦν, ἔπλωσα καὶ ἐς Τύρον τῆς Φοινίκης, πυθανόμενος αὐτόθι εἶναι ἱρὸν Ἡρακλέος ἁγίον. καὶ εἶδον

Wanting to obtain clear knowledge about these matters, as far as this was possible, I sailed to Tyre in Phoenicia, having learned that there was a sacred temple of Heracles there. And I saw

Hdt. 2.44.1–3

He gives us his sources:¹⁵

ἔθουν δὲ πάντα πρότερον οἱ Πελασγοὶ θεοῖσι ἐπευχόμενοι, ὥς ἐγὼ ἐν Δωδώνῃ οἶδα ἀκούσας, ἔπωνυμίην δὲ οὐδ' οὐνομα ἐποιεῦντο οὐδενὶ αὐτῶν.

In ancient times, as I know from what I was told at Dodona, the Pelasgians offered sacrifices of all kinds, and prayed to the gods, but without any distinction of name or title.

Hdt. 2.52.1

He evaluates these sources:¹⁶

αὐτῶν δὲ δὴ Αἰγυπτίων οἱ μὲν περὶ τὴν σπειρομένην Αἴγυπτον οἰκέουσι, μνήμην ἀνθρώπων πάντων ἐπασκέοντες μάλιστα λογιώτατοί εἰσι μακρῶ τῶν ἐγὼ ἐς διάπειραν ἀπικόμην.

The Egyptians who live in the cultivated parts of the country, by their practice of keeping records of the past, have made themselves by far the most learned of any nation of which I have had experience.

Hdt. 2.77.1

This is not confined to praise—the narrator also roundly disparages sources whose information he considers unreliable.¹⁷

He tests hypotheses by his own reasoning:

καὶ μὲν εἴ γε παρ' Ἑλλήνων ἔλαβον οὐνομά τεο δαίμονος, τούτων οὐκ ἥκιστα ἀλλὰ μάλιστα ἔμελλον μνήμην ἔξειν, εἴ περ καὶ τότε ναυτιλίῃσι ἐχρέωντο καὶ ἦσαν Ἑλλήνων τινὲς ναυτίλοι, ὥς ἔλπομαι τε καὶ ἐμὴ γνώμη αἰρᾷ· ὥστε τούτων ἂν καὶ μᾶλλον τῶν θεῶν τὰ οὐνόματα ἐξεπιστεύατο Αἰγύπτιοι ἢ τοῦ Ἡρακλέος.

If [the Egyptians] took the name of any divinity from the Greeks, they would have remembered the names of these gods [i.e. Poseidon and the Dioscuri] most of all, if at that time there were some sailors among the Greeks who made sea voyages, *as I expect and my judgement suggests*. So the Egyptians would know the names of *these* gods rather than that of Heracles.

Hdt. 2.43.2–3

In the course of this reasoning he often uses the language of ‘proof’, especially the word *tekmerion*.¹⁸ The narrator is also frank about the limits of his autopsy and his lack of knowledge:¹⁹

μέχρι μὲν τούτου ὅψις τε ἐμὴ καὶ γνώμη καὶ ἱστορίη ταῦτα λέγουσά ἐστι, τὸ δὲ ἀπὸ τοῦδε αἰγυπτίους ἐρχομαι λόγους ἐρέων κατὰ [τὰ] ἡκουον· προσέσται δέ τι αὐτοῖσι καὶ τῆς ἐμῆς ὀψιος.

Up to this point I have confined what I have written to the results of my own direct observation and research, and the views I have formed from them; but from now on I shall tell the stories of the Egyptians themselves as I heard them—though here too I include things that I have seen with my own eyes.

Hdt. 2.99.2

Occasionally he presents us with digested conclusions, signalled as the *result* of the evidence he has found:

τὰ μὲν νυν ἱστορημένα δηλοῖ σαφέως παλαιὸν θεὸν Ἡρακλέα ἔοντα· καὶ δοκεῖσσι δέ μοι οὗτοι ὀρθότατα Ἑλλήνων ποιεῖν, οἱ . . .

The result of these researches is a plain proof that the worship of Heracles is very ancient; and I think that the wisest course is taken by those Greeks who . . .

Hdt. 2.44.5

So much for Herodotus’ up-front and apparently scrupulous approach to sources. Associated with this are a number of stylistic features. The narrator typically ‘signposts’ his movement from one topic to another with a brief retrospective or prospective comment, giving the narrative the clarity and self-consciousness of a report:²⁰

κατὰ μὲν δὴ τὴν τροφὴν τῶν παιδίων τοσαῦτα ἔλεγον. ἤκουσα δὲ καὶ ἄλλα ἐν Μέλμφοι

Concerning the nurturing of the children, this, then, is what they said. But I heard another story in Memphis

Hdt. 2.3.1

He makes direct internal references to other parts of the narrative:[21](#)

ὅτι γὰρ δὴ μὴ Ποσειδέωνος καὶ Διοσκούρων, ὥς καὶ πρότερόν μοι ταῦτα εἶρηται

[The names of the Gods have been known in Egypt from the beginning] except for those of Poseidon and the Dioscuri, *as I have already said*

Hdt. 50.1; ref. to 43.3.

He asks rhetorical questions in defending his own arguments as, for example, in his rationalisation of the story of the two ‘black doves’ told by the prophetesses of Dodona:

ἔως δὲ ἐβαρβάριζε, ὄρνιθος τρόπον ἐδόκεε σφί φθέγγεσθαι, ἐπεὶ τέω τρόπῳ ἂν πελειᾶς γε ἀνθρωπηίῃ φωνῇ φθέγγαιτο;

As long as she spoke a barbarian language, she seemed to them to be speaking in a bird-like way; *for how could doves speak with a human voice?*

Hdt. 2.57.2

He is careful to attribute views to the right source:[22](#)

τούτων τὰ μὲν πρῶτα αἱ Δωδωνίδες ἱρήϊαι λέγουσι, τὰ δὲ ὕστερα τὰ ἐς Ἡσίοδόν τε καὶ Ὅμηρον ἔχοντα ἐγὼ λέγω.

For the former part of my statement on these matters I have the authority of the priestesses of Dodona, but the latter part about Hesiod and Homer is what I say.

Hdt. 2.53.3

He is explicit about how he selects what he tells us, and several times notes that he is passing over other material:[23](#)

ἄγραι δὲ σφεων πολλὰ κατεσθᾶσι καὶ παντοῖαι· ἥ δ' ὣν ἐμοὶ δοκέει ἀξιώτατῃ ἀπηγήσιος εἶναι, ταύτην γράφω.

And there are many hunting methods of various sorts for these [crocodiles], but *I shall relate the one I think most worthy of mention.*

Hdt. 2.70.1

From the modern perspective Herodotus' greatest innovation is his insistence on sources and his self-conscious manipulation of the narrative. A narrator with such attributes is certainly very foreign to Homeric epic, Athenian tragedy²⁴ and what survives of pre-Herodotean prose ethnography. In a detailed analysis of Herodotus' 'voiceprint', stressing many of the features outlined here (alongside others not in evidence in these chapters of book two), Robert Fowler argues that Herodotus 'invented the *problem* of sources'.²⁵ But the problem was soon forgotten or dealt with in other ways: Thucydides did not adopt Herodotus' free and open discussion of sources, and Thucydides, not Herodotus, would become the model for many later writers. The closest parallel for Herodotean empiricism is the Ionian medical writing of the Hippocratic Corpus, parts of which may be roughly contemporary with Herodotus. A comparison between the narrative personas employed by Herodotus and the Hippocratic *Airs, Waters, Places*, reveals that they have much in common.²⁶

The Egyptian *logos* contains a particularly intriguing instance of historical and literary source criticism: the discussion of the whereabouts of Helen during the Trojan War. Herodotus endorses the 'alternative' tradition told by the Egyptian priests (a variant also related by Stesichorus and Euripides) that Helen did not go to Troy but spent the war in Egypt.²⁷ As proof, Herodotus reasons that, if Helen had been at Troy, Priam would have surrendered her to the Greeks after seeing so many of his sons die. Herodotus then argues that Homer shows knowledge of the real version (by citing Homeric passages that connect Paris and Menelaus with Egypt), and claims that Homer suppressed this, choosing the Helen-at-Troy version because it was 'fitting for epic' (ἐς τὴν ἐποποιίην εὐπρεπής, 2.116.1). Nino Luraghi has written: 'this, we are expected to understand, is the kind of liberty the author of the *Histories* would not claim for himself'.²⁸ In the context of this particular passage Luraghi's comments are clearly correct, for this is precisely how Herodotus goes about claiming the superiority of his own version: compared with his own *historie*, Homeric epic is a less trustworthy guide, if you read it straightforwardly at least,²⁹ since it is guided by criteria other than a desire to reconstruct the past accurately and uses poetic licence. In these comments about what is 'fitting' for an epic, Herodotus assumes an aesthetic theory of a sort not uncommon in the fifth century.³⁰

Similar assumptions about the untrustworthiness of epic crop up elsewhere in the Egyptian *logos*. In discussing the origin of the Nile and its bewildering tendency to flood in summer, Herodotus disparages those who explain the phenomenon by reference to Ocean:

ὁ δὲ περὶ τοῦ Ὠκεανοῦ λέξας ἐς ἀφανὲς τὸν μῦθον ἀνενείκας οὐκ ἔχει ἔλεγχον· οὐ γάρ τινα ἔγωγε οἶδα ποταμὸν Ὠκεανὸν ἔοντα, Ὅμηρον δὲ ἢ τινα τῶν πρότερον γενομένων ποιητέων δοκέω τοῦνομα εὐρόντα ἐς ποίησιν ἐσενείκασθαι.

As to the writer who mentions Ocean, he takes his discussion into the realm of the unseen, and thus his story cannot be disproven. I know myself of no river Ocean, and I think Homer or another of the poets of old invented the name and introduced it into poetry.

Hdt. 2.23

A clear link emerges, then, between epic and fabulous invention on the basis of aesthetic criteria. Although Herodotus does not use the language of ‘truth’ and ‘falsity’, he sets up a clear opposition between what really happened and what did not, and claims his research provides us with the former.

It is the narrator’s insistence on using sources and reasoning to reconstruct the (factual) truth that has led many critics to make generalisations about the *Histories* like the following statement by Aristotle, on the distinction between poetry and history (*Poetics* 1541a36–b10):

φανερὸν δὲ ἐκ τῶν εἰρημένων καὶ ὅτι οὐ τὸ τὰ γενόμενα λέγειν, τοῦτο ποιητοῦ ἔργον ἐστίν, ἀλλ’ οἷα ἂν γένοιτο καὶ τὰ δυνατὰ κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς ἢ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον. ὁ γὰρ ἱστορικὸς καὶ ὁ ποιητὴς οὐ τῷ ἢ ἔμμετρα λέγειν ἢ ἄμμετρα διαφέρουσιν (εἴη γὰρ ἂν τὰ Ἡροδότου εἰς μέτρα τεθῆναι καὶ οὐδὲν ἦττον ἂν εἴη ἱστορία τις μετὰ μέτρου ἢ ἄνευ μέτρων) ἀλλὰ τούτῳ διαφέρει, τῷ τὸν μὲν τὰ γενόμενα λέγειν, τὸν δὲ οἷα ἂν γένοιτο. διὸ καὶ φιλοσοφώτερον καὶ σπουδαιότερον ποίησις ἱστορίας ἐστίν· ἢ μὲν γὰρ ποιήσις μᾶλλον τὰ καθόλου, ἢ δ’ ἱστορία τὰ καθ’ ἕκαστον λέγει.

It is clear from what has been said that the job of the poet is not to say what happened, but to say what might have happened according to probability or necessity. For the *historikos* and the *poietes* differ not in that one speaks in metre, and the other in prose (*for even if we put Herodotus into metre it would be no less a work of history [historia] when it had metre than without it*). Rather they differ in this: in that one says what happened, the other what might happen. *This is why poesis is more philosophical and serious than historia. For poesis speaks more of the whole, while historia speaks to the particular.*

This judgement, however unsatisfactory as an evaluation of the *Histories* as a whole, seems to be a sound description of Herodotus’ narrative style in the Egyptian *logos*. It is also invited by Herodotus’ own introduction, which describes his writing as the ‘display’ of an ‘inquiry’—the ἱστορίας ἀπόδεξις (1.1.1). In Herodotus’ work the word *historie* and cognates indicate empirical inquiry by an individual of limited knowledge into specific matters.³¹ The trouble is that if we attempt to analyse other parts of the *Histories* according to these

definitions of *historie* and *poiesis*, we find that Herodotus' writing was, according to Aristotle's criteria, 'poetry'.

The 'Mimetic' Persona

At this point I move to my second topic: the truth status of a quite different (but no less Herodotean) narrative style, which I shall label 'mimetic'. My focus will be on four dialogues held between a prosperous monarch and a warning interlocutor, and the narratives of the subsequent misfortunes of these monarchs. These dialogues are placed at key structural points in the work,³² where the warner cautions the ruler about the 'grudging' (*phthoneros*) nature of the divine and the instability of mortal good fortune, or the necessity of suffering in human life. Already in antiquity Plutarch's *On the Malice of Herodotus* argued that Herodotus puts his own ideas in the mouth of the Athenian sage Solon,³³ and many modern commentators have noticed that the speeches of these warners contain a didactic lesson not only for the monarchs involved, but for the audience as well.³⁴

As we shall see, Herodotus' endorsement of his warners' analysis is clear: Artabanus' predictions to Xerxes are borne out in detail in the subsequent narrative (further below) and Herodotus, as narrator, prefaces Solon's speech to Croesus on the mutability of human affairs by saying that he 'told the truth' (1.30.3). Solon's speech is, moreover, intimately related to Herodotus' programmatic statement in the proem (1.5.4, cf. 1.207.2).³⁵

Having observed that these dialogues and the speeches in which they culminate contain one of the central didactic messages of the *Histories*—the mixed and unstable nature of human εὐδαιμονίη—I want now to look at the way Herodotus integrates these ideas into the warner's speeches, and the wider narratives within which they are embedded. My interest is, in particular, the details of the techniques by which Herodotus communicates this message to the reader.

The first point is the most basic, concerning placement and structure. Herodotus situates the dialogues in question immediately before the decline of two of the most powerful kingdoms he describes (the Lydian and the Samian), and at two fateful points in the disastrous Persian campaign (when Xerxes decides to go to war, and before he crosses the Hellespont). Divine *phthonos*—which occurs in the speeches of Solon, Amasis and Artabanus—is also mentioned in Themistocles' speech after the victory of Salamis (8.109.3). Thereafter we can list a number of features, within the speeches themselves and

the surrounding narratives, that implicitly and explicitly confer authority upon the warners and recall their message. Notable by their absence are most of the features that we observed in the Egyptian *logos*: we find few sources, no reports of the author's own inquiry and no claims of autopsy. Where we do find them, it is typically in the course of digressions about particular objects of curiosity, a point to which I shall return in the final sections.

Moving now to the presentation of the material, in the Egyptian *logos* we observed frequent 'signposting', to mark a change of subject matter or summarise at the end of a discussion, along with several internal references. In Herodotus' mimetic scenes there is also a good deal of self-referential material, but this takes the form not of explicit internal references, but rather of careful structuring and juxtaposition, subtle allusion, verbal echo, and the recollections of the characters themselves. In sum, these internal references are more artistic and dramatic. Let us turn to some examples.

The warner's speeches make predictions that are vindicated by the subsequent narrative. Artabanus' warning to Xerxes in the war council runs as follows:

οὕτω δὲ καὶ στρατὸς πολλὸς ὑπὸ ὀλίγου διαφθείρεται κατὰ τοιόνδε ἐπεάν σφι ὁ θεὸς φθονήσας φόβον ἐμβάλῃ ἢ βροντὴν, δι' ὧν ἐφθάρησαν ἀναξίως ἑωυτῶν. οὐ γὰρ ἔῃ φρονέειν μέγα ὁ θεὸς ἄλλον ἢ ἑωυτόν.

Often a great army is destroyed by a little one, *when god in his envy casts down panic or lightning-storms, and they are destroyed unworthily of themselves*. For god does not allow any but himself to think big.

Hdt. 7.10.ε

On two portentous occasions lightning and fear do fall upon the Persian army, just as predicted.³⁶ Likewise, one of the attributes Solon lists for the 'lucky man of moderate means' is that he is *eupais* (1.32.6, 'well childed', we might say; cf. 1.30.5: Τέλλω . . . παῖδες ἧσαν καλοί τε κἀγαθοί). Croesus' belief that he is the most *olbios* of men draws down divine *nemesis*, which brings the death of his son, and only acknowledged child (1.44–5).

Numerous concepts and themes unite the warners' dialogues with the narratives they precede, and a host of delicate verbal echoes draws our attention to them. There is a clear conceptual similarity between Solon's characterisation of the *phthoneros* divinity who 'shows to many a hint of happiness before destroying them utterly' (1.32.9), and Artabanus' vision of god, who 'gives a taste (*geuo*) of the sweet life, but has been found to be *phthoneros* (grudging) of it' (7.46). Likewise,

the parallel expressions by which Solon and Amasis state their knowledge of the *phthoneros* nature of divinity are striking.³⁷ As we saw, above, Artabanus states that those towards whom god feels *phthonos* are destroyed ‘unworthily of themselves’. The narrator’s epitaph of Polycrates, who earlier fell foul of divine *phthonos*, uses the same phrase: ‘thus Polycrates was destroyed in a terrible way, *unworthily of himself* and his ambitions’.³⁸ Immediately before Polycrates’ good fortune attracts Amasis’ warning, the narrator says, ‘wherever Polycrates desired to campaign, everything went well for him’,³⁹ almost an identical repetition of the words that precede Cyrus’ fatal campaign against the Massagetae and Croesus’ warning on the ‘circle of human affairs’.⁴⁰ Solon tells Croesus that ‘god gives a hint of happiness (*olbos*) to many, and then destroys them down to the root (*prorrizous*)’. Amasis’ warning to Polycrates on divine *phthonos* ends with the same word: ‘I have never heard of someone who was fortunate in everything, who did not come to an utterly (*prorrizos*) bad end.’ The word occurs only at one other point in the *Histories*, again in a speech, this time by the Spartan Leotychides about the divine destruction of the perfidious Glaucus.⁴¹

There are further connections between these warnings and the subsequent reversals of fortune. In conversation with Croesus, Solon makes the epigrammatic statement that ‘man is entirely *sumphorē*’. *Sumphorē* commonly means ‘chance’ or ‘disaster’, and becomes the watchword of the following narrative, occurring six times in the four *OCT* pages that tell the story of Atys’ death at the hands of Adrastus.⁴² Adrastus ultimately kills himself, aware that he is the ‘most ill-fated man (βαρυσυμφορώτατος) whom he himself knew’ (1.45.3). The echoes go further. When his son dies, Croesus is said to be *suntetaragmenos* (‘terribly perturbed’, 1.44.1), echoing Solon’s statement that god is *tarachodes* (‘disturbing’ or ‘meddlesome’, 1.32.1); the words come from the same root, and it is one that Artabanus also associates with divine *phthonos*.⁴³ In the dialogue at Abydos too, *sumphorē* recurs several times, particularly in Artabanus’ epigrammatic phrase: ‘Learn that *sumphorai* rule men, and not men *sumphorai*’ (7.49.3, cf. 7.46.3).

The dialogue between Croesus and Solon centres on the opposition between temporary *eutukhie* (‘good fortune’) on the one hand, and the concepts of *olbos* and *eudaimonie* on the other (both of which connote a more holistic prosperity and contentment).⁴⁴ The narrator, of course, opened his narrative with the statement that human prosperity (*eudaimonie*) never stays long in one place (1.5.4), and the terms *olbos* and *euesto* (also ‘prosperity’) recur in the story of Croesus at a particularly significant juncture: in the midst of the sack of Sardis,

when Croesus is almost killed. Croesus' mute son speaks for the first time to save his father's life from an advancing Persian soldier, and at this point the narrator mentions an oracle that the Pythia had given to Croesus 'in his former prosperity' (*euesto* or *euthenia*, 1.85.1).⁴⁵ The Pythian oracle, quoted in hexameters, had told Croesus that his son would first speak on a day that was unhappy (*anolbos*, 1.85.2). When the man rushed to attack him, Croesus was 'so beset by the present *sumphore*' (1.85.3) that he no longer cared whether he lived or died. This flashback to the oracle provides an opportunity to revisit the heights of Croesus' prosperity and his desire to be *olbiotatos*, at the moment when he is so upset by *sumphore*—that human constant stressed by Solon—that he is indifferent to life itself. This effect is achieved by careful structuring and linguistic echo.

Thus far the textual parallels I have discussed serve to draw attention to the ideas of Solon, Amasis and Artabanus, and to recall their words during the scenes that follow, reminding us that these reversals of fortune are exemplars of the pessimistic wisdom pronounced by the warners. We have seen indirect techniques such as verbal echoes, subtle flashbacks and thematic resemblances. Yet Herodotus also uses more direct techniques.

After Croesus and Polycrates suffer a reversal of fortune we find explicit references back to the warning speeches that came before (those of Solon and Amasis, respectively). Croesus, sitting on the pyre, about to be burned, calls Solon's name three times, and reflects that what Solon said was said 'with god':

τῷ δὲ Κροίσῳ ἔστεῶτι ἐπὶ τῆς πυρῆς ἐσελθεῖν, καίπερ ἐν κακῷ ἔοντι τοσοῦτῳ, τὸ τοῦ Σόλωνος, ὥς οἱ εἶη σὺν θεῷ εἰρημένον, τὸ μηδένα εἶναι τῶν ζώντων ὀλβιον . . . αὐτῷ [τῷ Κροίσῳ] πάντα ἀποβεβήκοι τῇ περ ἐκεῖνος [ὁ Σόλων] εἶπε, οὐδέν τι μᾶλλον ἐς ἑωυτὸν λέγων ἢ <οὐκ> ἐς ἅπαν τὸ ἀνθρώπινον καὶ μάλιστα τοὺς παρὰ σφίσι αὐτοῖσι ὀλβίους δοκέοντας εἶναι.

When Croesus was on the pyre (so the story goes)⁴⁶ although he was in such a bad way, *it came to him that Solon's words—that no living creature is happy*—were spoken with god . . . [Croesus told Cyrus that] everything had happened in the way in which Solon said, *for he had spoken no more to him than to the entire human race, and especially to those who consider themselves happy*.

Hdt. 1.86.3 and 86.5

Similarly, after the death of Polycrates at the hands of the Oroites, the narrator gives him a brief epitaph: 'The many good fortunes of Polycrates ended in the way *in which Amasis, King of Egypt had foretold*' (3.125.4).⁴⁷ Such explicit endorsements by the characters and

narrators are rare but significant.

I move now to another notable feature of these speeches and the narratives they accompany: their elevated and poetic tone. A wealth of poetic parallels has been observed in Solon's speech on divine *phthonos* and mortal *olbos* (1.32–3) and throughout the Croesus *logos*: fine studies have been published by Charles Chiasson and Chris Pelling, and there is no need to repeat their observations here.⁴⁸ The same can be observed in the speeches of Amasis and those of Xerxes and Artabanus in the Persian war council, who employ elevated vocabulary and phraseology. To take an example, the term *aion* is used on only five occasions in the *Histories* (all to refer to the human 'life'). These are in the speeches under discussion by Solon, Amasis and Artabanus, in addition to Harmocydes' speech to the Phocaeans before Plataea (recommending a glorious death in battle), and the Athenian speech to the Tegeans (the seven 'ended their *aion* and lay unburied').⁴⁹ Artabanus' use of *aion* accompanies his statement of divine *phthonos* and a rare example of Herodotean hyperbaton: ὁ θεὸς γλυκὺν γεύσας τὸν αἰῶνα φθονερός ἐν αὐτῷ εὗρίσκεται ἐών ('[The] god, having tasted the *sweet life*, has been found to be grudging of it', 7.47).⁵⁰

The word *prorrizos*, occurring only in speeches by Solon, Amasis and Leotychides, can be paralleled in the *Iliad* (when Hector is compared with the falling of a mighty oak by Zeus' thunderbolt), and used metaphorically of people or houses that are utterly destroyed in Aeschylus' *Persians*, Euripides' *Hippolytus* and Sophocles' *Electra*.⁵¹ It cannot be paralleled in this metaphorical sense in later prose, or elsewhere in the *Histories*. Xerxes' dramatic and ominous speech in the Persian war council is likewise replete with poeticisms: *puroo* ('burn'),⁵² the periphrastic reference to the Greeks as 'those who cultivate the land of Pelops the Phrygian' (οἱ Πέλοπος τοῦ Φρυγὸς νέμονται χώραν, 7.8.γ1),⁵³ the images of the 'watching sun' (7.8.γ2)⁵⁴ and of 'Zeus' heaven' (τῷ Διὸς αἰθέρι, 7.8.γ2)⁵⁵ and his intention to impose the 'yoke of slavery' upon the Greeks (δοῦλιον ζυγόν, 7.8.δ1).⁵⁶ Artabanus' subsequent warning to Xerxes repeats a monitory formula commonly used by tragic characters in delivering *sententiae*: ὁρᾷς τὰ ὑπερέχοντα ζῶα . . . ὁρᾷς δὲ ὡς . . . (7.10.ε.1). This formula (like the imperative μάθε, 'learn')⁵⁷ is used throughout the Herodotean speeches on the instability of the human condition.⁵⁸ Another word that reverberates through the dramatic climaxes of the *Histories* is the verb *epairein* ('to incite'), as Avery has shown in detail, suggesting that the 'pregnant' usage of the word to presage disaster echoes the usage of Attic tragedy.⁵⁹

It is also significant that these speeches engage with the cultural world of Greek poetry rather than the world of ethnographic ‘realism’ on display elsewhere in the *Histories*. A good example is the finale of Artabanus’ speech in the Persian war council. Here Artabanus curses Mardonius in a remarkable perversion of the famous Spartan epigram attributed to Simonides (‘O stranger, go tell the Spartans that here we lie, obeying their orders’), which Herodotus reports later in the narrative (7.228.2). Artabanus’ prediction repays analysis, being one of the most intricately worked sentences of the *Histories*:

ἀκούσεσθαι τινά φημι τῶν αὐτοῦ τῇδε ὑπολειπομένων Μαρδόνιον, μέγα τι κακὸν ἐξεργασάμενον Πέρσας, ὑπὸ κυνῶν τε καὶ ὀρνίθων διαφορεόμενον ἢ κου ἐν γῇ τῇ Ἀθηναίων ἢ σέ γε ἐν τῇ Λακεδαιμονίων, εἰ μὴ ἄρα καὶ πρότερον κατ’ ὁδόν, γνόντα ἐπ’ οἴους ἄνδρας ἀναγινώσκεις στρατεῦεσθαι βασιλέα.

I say that one of those left behind will hear that a certain Mardonius, after having wrought great ill for the Persians, lies torn by the dogs and the birds either somewhere in the land of the Athenians or in the land of the Spartans, if not even earlier on the road, having finally realised against what sort of men you had persuaded the king to campaign.

Hdt. 7.10.0.3

In this scene Mardonius’ demise, like the Spartan’s glorious triumph, is imagined through its reporting back at home. Most strikingly, Mardonius’ body starts out as the inanimate object of the curse, but the living Mardonius is directly addressed by the introduction of the word *se*, ‘you’, in the third line—chillingly uniting the idea of the mutilated corpse with the man standing opposite. The move from the third person to apostrophe is otherwise not found in the *Histories*, and the emphatic restatement of the subject with *γε* has a Homeric feel, as Stein observed.⁶⁰ The idea of learning the truth by suffering the consequences of error—*πάθει μάθος*, as it is put in the first choral ode of Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*—was voiced by Croesus in conversation with Cyrus just before the latter’s death.⁶¹ Artabanus seems to evoke this idea by imagining Mardonius’ abused corpse as finally ‘knowing’ (γνόντα) what sort of men he had urged Xerxes to attack.

Artabanus uses the traditional motif of a corpse left unburied and ingloriously torn by the dogs and birds, with its clear Homeric overtones.⁶² This has struck commentators as odd because, in his *nomoi* of the Persians, Herodotus reports that Persians do not bury their dead *until they have been torn by a dog or bird*.⁶³ That the most damning curse Artabanus can muster draws on the customs of *homo Homericus* rather than *homo Persicus* reveals the degree to which we are engaging with Greek poetic tradition rather than the factual detail

General Truths Versus Particular Truths, or Poet Versus Inquirer

The previous section focused on two aspects of the monitory speeches of Solon, Amasis and Artabanus. First it established that they are connected to each other and to the reversals of fortune that they precede by the explicit recollections of the characters and the narrator, as well as by subtle thematic and verbal resonances, and careful placement and structure. Second it suggested that in these speeches and scenes Herodotus draws in greater density on motifs from Greek poetry, rather than the ‘realism’ of ethnographic inquiry, and makes no attempt to stress the factual veracity of the account by reference to sources, or by a visible and authoritative narratorial presence. These narratives thus constitute ‘fiction’ according to the competitive truth standards that Herodotus establishes in the proem and the Egyptian *logos*. Importantly, Herodotus uses precisely the sort of ‘poetic licence’ that he identifies in Homer’s account of the Trojan War.

At this point comparison with the practice of another great war historiographer may be illuminating. The distinction announced by Thucydides at the start of his *History* is significantly different from what was observed in the last section. Thucydides famously distinguishes his approach to narrative from his approach to speeches (1.22). In Herodotus, by contrast, the narratives that follow the speeches (with exceptions that we are about to explore) carefully vindicate the messages at the heart of the warners’ speeches. These narratives are constituted from a mixture of direct speech and narrative, with a particularly high density of the former.

It is striking that Herodotus uses these apparently fictional dialogues to present ideas of central importance to the work: what Fornara has called Herodotus’ ‘philosophy of history’.⁶⁴ These mediations on the transience of human fortune, at the level of the individual and the state, can be paralleled in epic, tragedy and lyric, although it may be Herodotus’ innovation to place them at the centre of the historical process. An intriguing dichotomy thus arises. Herodotus presents his search for *particular* truths in a strongly empirical style (making use of the argumentative tools discussed in the first section); by contrast, when it comes to his broader meditations on historical causation, Herodotus creatively and

unapologetically fabricates individual details to elucidate *general* truths.

According to Aristotle it is the general nature of *poiesis* that makes it more philosophical and important, and distinguishes it from the humdrum specificity of *historia*. To class Herodotus as a writer of history (*historikos*) as defined by Aristotle (or by the *histor-* word group in Herodotus' own writing) captures only half his art, for Herodotus presents his mimetic episodes as having precisely this general validity. This is explicitly stated but—typically of Herodotus' mimetic writing—by a character, not by the narrator. The man in question, Croesus of Lydia, had believed himself, at one time, to be the happiest man in the world. Herodotus tells us Croesus' words as he sits bound to a funeral pyre, an illustration of the ephemerality of human prosperity: Solon, Croesus realises, 'had spoken no more to Croesus than to the entire human race, particularly those who think themselves happy/blessed' (οὐδέν τι μᾶλλον ἐς ἑωυτὸν λέγων ἢ <οὐκ> ἐς ἅπαν τὸ ἀνθρώπινον καὶ μάλιστα τοὺς παρὰ σφίσι αὐτοῖσι ὀλβίους δοκέοντας εἶναι, Hdt. 1. 86.5).

According to the criteria Aristotle establishes, then, Herodotus must be considered both a poet seeking general truth and an inquirer/historian seeking particular truths. Although Aristotle's categorisation of Herodotus' writing as *historia* ('inquiry/history') is manifestly inadequate, his approach neatly distinguishes between two quite different approaches to narration. It is, perhaps, no coincidence that those points at which Herodotus is, in Aristotelian terms, a poet (*poietes*) are precisely the points where allusions to tragedy, epic and lyric, iambic rhythms, elegant periodic diction, and rare-vocabulary items are found in their greatest density. Elsewhere Aristotle singles out the idea at the heart of these dialogues—that 'the divinity is *phthoneros*'—as a 'poetic' lie:⁶⁵

εἰ δὴ λέγουσι τι οἱ ποιηταὶ καὶ πέφυκε φθονεῖν τὸ θεῖον, ἐπὶ τούτου συμβῆναι μάλιστα εἰκὸς καὶ δυστυχεῖς εἶναι πάντας τοὺς περιττοὺς. ἀλλ' οὔτε τὸ θεῖον φθονερόν ἐνδέχεται εἶναι, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὴν παροιμίαν πολλὰ ψεύδονται αἰδοί.

If *the poets* are at all right to say that the divine is naturally disposed to *feel phthonos*, then we should expect all prodigious beings to be unfortunate. But is not to be accepted that the divine is *phthoneros*; rather, as the saying goes, *the poets tell many lies*.

Aristotle, *Met.* 983a

That the precise terms τὸ θεῖον and φθονερός only occur together in Herodotus' *Histories* (1.32.1, 3.40.2) is not, in itself, decisive proof that

Aristotle is alluding here to Herodotus.⁶⁶ Yet it seems likely that even Aristotle would have allowed that the *Histories* contains a good deal of material that falls outside *historia* as he defines it.⁶⁷

I have implied above that Herodotus' selection of the mimetic or the historical narrative mode is primarily determined by the type of truth he seeks (factual truth or general truth), and this claim requires some defence. Drawing on the older developmental explanation for the diversity of Herodotus' *Histories*, Charles Fornara has suggested that book two was the work of a younger, more polemical, empirical writer, while the Croesus *logos* is the work of an older, more mature author whose style had developed to embrace more dramatic, theological and philosophical material.⁶⁸ Telling against this view, however, is the fact that Herodotus frequently employs the 'empirical' mode of narration (i.e. all those traits observed in book two) within the Lydian *logos* of book one. But crucially, these features are primarily confined to the digressions that punctuate the story of the rise and fall of Lydia.

The Corinthians and Lesbians, for example, are twice identified as the source of the story of Arion and the dolphin (1.23.1, 24.8), and the word λέγουσι ('they say') is repeated twice more in the course of the narrative (1.24.1, 24.6), which is given in indirect statement (accusative + infinitive). In relating Croesus' dedications to Delphi Herodotus goes into great detail, implying his own autopsy through detailed descriptions of the physical layout of the temple (1.51.1) and explaining how what was originally dedicated differs from what can now be seen (1.50.3, νῦν). He refers to the authoritative opinions of the 'Delphians' (1.51.3) about which treasures Croesus dedicated, and dismisses those who claim that some of these treasures came from other Greek cities, even claiming to know the name of the dishonest Delphian responsible for inscribing mendacious attributions upon the objects (1.51.4). In the digression on Athens and Sparta, prompted by Croesus' search for allies, Herodotus likewise uses the language of competitive inquiry in considering what language the Pelasgians might have spoken (1.56–8). Here he shows a particular sensitivity to the question of what types of inference can be drawn from what types of evidence (e.g. 1.57.1, 1.57.3). In describing Croesus' campaign against Cyrus—although the surrounding narrative is replete with unproblematic insight into the minds and intentions of the characters—the narrator pauses to engage in polemic about how they crossed the River Halys: by pre-existing bridges, or by a prodigious feat of aquatic engineering masterminded by Thales? Herodotus is in no doubt, but his certainty is born from his faculty for logical reasoning rather than omniscience: had it been done by Thales' method, he asks

rhetorically, how would they have got back? Herodotus' swift adoption of the empirical persona for questions of particular interest within the context of mimetically narrated stories suggests that the difference between the narrative styles of books one and two is not to be explained by the date or sequence of composition, nor simply by subject matter alone, but rather by a combination of subject matter and the author's narratorial goals.⁶⁹

Complicating Truths

Having made the case that there are two types of truth in the *Histories*, which Herodotus pursues using quite distinct narratorial styles, this section will test this thesis against some counter-examples. The remainder of the article examines several points where these two styles and truth standards seem to come into contact and even conflict.

I first consider a set of passages that pose a superficial challenge for this thesis. To take an example:

ὁ Σόλων . . . ἀπικόμενος δὲ ἐξαινίζετο ἐν τοῖσι βασιλῆϊοισι ὑπὸ τοῦ Κροίσου· μετὰ δέ, ἡμέρη τρίτη ἢ τετάρτη, κελεύσαντος Κροίσου τὸν Σόλωνα θεράποντες περιῆγον κατὰ τοὺς θησαυροὺς.

Solon . . . having arrived at Sardis was hosted in the palace by Croesus. Then, *on the third or fourth day*, Croesus ordered the servants to lead Solon to the treasury.

Hdt. 1.30.2

Such equivocation on trivial details is relatively common. 'On the fifth or sixth day' after Polycrates threw his prized ring into the sea 'the following occurred', Herodotus tells us, before launching into the narrative of the fisherman who catches the fish that has swallowed the ring (3.42.1). When Cyrus concocts a cunning plan to persuade the Persians to revolt against the Medians, he brings them to a field covered in thistles, which was 'eighteen or twenty stades on each side', and tells them to clear it for cultivation (1.126.1).⁷⁰

Each example stands out from the surrounding narrative, which is narrated by a wholly omniscient narrator who reports the innermost thoughts and private plans of the protagonists. The narrator's equivocation on such tiny details technically implies a lack of omniscience, and might seem to evoke the 'empirical' narrator who is frank about his epistemological limitations. Yet, although the narrator breaks the illusion of omniscience, these phrases situate him more

firmly than ever within the world of mimetic storytelling. If anything, this casual vagueness seems to signal that the narrator is employing his creative faculties: that he is inventing the particular to paint a scene for other purposes. It might be seen as a way of reconciling Herodotus' admission of his limited knowledge with his assumption of omniscience.⁷¹

The same can perhaps be said for some examples of the problematisation of motivation using the formula εἴτε . . . εἴτε ('whether . . . or'). Often, as Emily Baragwanath has observed, the alternatives outlined seem not to be exclusive, but may both plausibly be true, and so each adds to the characterisation. Did Amasis marry Ladice because he wanted a Greek wife, or to make an alliance with the Cyrenians? Quite possibly, both.⁷² In any case, given the narrator's unproblematic access to the emotional states, thoughts and plans of the characters elsewhere, his choice to highlight some questions using this pattern seems not to reflect any wider attempt to present himself as epistemologically cautious, of the sort we have seen in the historical mode.

A more serious conflict between different types of narratorial persona and truth status occurs at the end of the Croesus *logos*. In the scene in which Cyrus determines to burn Croesus alive on a pyre, Herodotus briefly enters an indirect speech construction (accusative + infinitive, 1.86.3–87.2). Only much later does Herodotus indicate a source: when Apollo comes to the rescue of Croesus with a miraculous rain shower, the narrator says that the following story is what 'is said by the Lydians' (ἐνθαῦτα λέγεται ὑπὸ Λυδῶν, 1.87.1). A second accusative + infinitive construction follows, reporting Croesus' miraculous salvation up to the point where Cyrus addresses Croesus in person (1.87.3). After a verbatim report of the conversation, the narrative continues in the indicative/direct speech (from 1.88.3) as Herodotus describes the amazement of the Persians on hearing Croesus' words.⁷³ As Irene de Jong has observed on this passage, 'primary and reported narrative in the *Histories* are less fundamentally distinct from each other than would appear at first sight, and the primary narrator exercises a tight control on all levels of the story'.⁷⁴

Chiasson has offered an explanation for Herodotus' unsignalled movement into indirect speech: the treatment of the story of Croesus on the pyre in several famous earlier accounts (which give different stories) elicits a more cautious treatment; the story had been told, of course, in the third Epinician ode of Bacchylides, and quite possibly elsewhere.⁷⁵ In this Chiasson follows Marincola's suggestion: that Herodotus seems to be more interested in sources when he treats

material that others have covered before him.⁷⁶

But Chiasson goes further, arguing that this is one of several self-conscious and competitive attempts in the Lydian *logos* to ‘transcend’ tragic narrative. By his use of indirect speech Herodotus ‘implicitly underscores a fundamental difference between the nature of his research and the Greek poetic tradition . . . based (as it seems) upon credulous acceptance of local legend, whether Lydian or Delphic’.⁷⁷ If this explanation is right, Herodotus has chosen a surprising forum for this contest, for the pyre scene is the dramatic and *pathos*-filled culmination to Herodotus’ Croesus *logos*, replete with Homeric and tragic echoes, and moral truths communicated through traditional poetic means, as Chiasson himself points out.⁷⁸ It would suggest that Herodotus’ deep-seated epistemological caution causes him to undermine his rather epic pose of omniscience intentionally by juxtaposing two rather incompatible ideas of truth.

Another strange source attribution, however, is not so amenable to Chiasson’s reading, and suggests the possibility of a different interpretation. I refer to the elaborate and entirely mimetic narrative of the divine dreams that visit Xerxes and Artabanus at the start of book seven, immediately after the Persian war council. The attribution of this story to the Persians has often been taken to indicate that Herodotus does not believe the subsequent story (particularly by commentators who find the theological implications of these deceptive dreams troubling).⁷⁹ But the source attribution is, in fact, far less tidy. At the end of the Persian war council, another narrative thread begins:

ταῦτα μὲν ἐπὶ τοσοῦτο ἐλέγετο. Μετὰ δὲ εὐφρόνη τε ἐγίνετο καὶ Ξέρξην ἔκνιζε ἡ Ἀρταβάνου γνώμη· νυκτὶ δὲ βουλὴν διδοὺς πάγχυ εὕρισκέ οἱ οὐ πρῆγμα εἶναι στρατεύεσθαι ἐπὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα. δεδογμένων δὲ οἱ αὐτὶς τούτων κατύπνωσε. καὶ δὴ κου ἐν τῇ νυκτὶ εἶδε ὄφιν τοιήνδε, ὡς λέγεται ὑπὸ Περσέων· ἐδόκεε ὁ Ξέρξης ἄνδρα οἱ ἐπιστάντα μέγαν τε καὶ εὐειδέα εἰπεῖν. «Μετὰ δὴ βουλεύεαι, ὦ Πέρσες . . .

Thus Xerxes spoke. Then, when it became night, Artabanus’ opinion gnawed at Xerxes. Taking counsel with himself during the night, he found that it was entirely against his interests to campaign against Greece. And having decided this he immediately fell asleep. And in the course of the night he saw a vision of the following sort, *as the Persians say*. Xerxes thought that a great and handsome man stood above him, and said, ‘So, you have changed your mind have you, Persian?’

Hdt. 7.12.1

And the narrative continues, without another whiff of sources, or any of the other diagnostic signs of Herodotean *historie* as identified in the first section. Several features are notable. The first is the tardiness of

the source attribution and the indivisibility of the narrative into the elements that this attribution seems to imply, i.e. the narrator's words and the source's words. What the narrator asserts (that Xerxes changed his mind) and what the Persians are said to relate (that a dream forced him to change it back) are a composite whole, which presents Xerxes' decision to go to war as the result of the dream's refusal to let him change his mind. The same problem, in fact, can be observed in the scene of Croesus on the pyre: what the narrator reports in accusative and infinitive without giving a source (that the Persians were unable to put out the fire) and what the Lydians are reported to have said (that Croesus called upon Apollo, and that a rain storm followed and extinguished the flames) form an indivisible whole: otherwise Croesus is burned to death on the pyre and Xerxes arises refreshed from an undisturbed sleep never to invade Greece. If we are to accept the Lydian and Persian source attributions at all, we must apply them retrospectively to the first part of the story that is related in the narrator's voice. But it would, I think, be a mistake to ignore the nonchalance with which Herodotus treats the source attribution here.

In the Persian *logos* there is no doubt that the story of the dreams, technically attributed to the Persians, forms an essential part of Herodotus' dramatisation of the genesis of the war. Xerxes, in fact, refers back to the dreams in conversation with Artabanus at Abydos—an episode, we should note, that is narrated mimetically by the narrator and contains no source attributions. 'Tell me this,' the king says to Artabanus, after the latter has lectured him on the *phthoneros* nature of god and the misery of the human condition, 'if the dream had not appeared so clearly, would you have stuck to your original view, to not allow me to campaign against Greece, or would you have changed your mind? Come, tell me that clearly' (7.47.1). In the somewhat Homeric world that Artabanus and Xerxes inhabit at the start of book seven, the reality of the dreams is taken for granted. Nevertheless we can see the traces of Herodotus' epistemological caution creeping in at the edges.

These two episodes seem to indicate a partial blending of two Herodotean narratorial modes that are most often kept distinct, and the types of truth they offer. There seems to be a great difference between the meticulous reliance on sources and autopsy in the *historie* of the Egyptian *logos* and the voice of subtly qualified omniscience that leads Herodotus to equivocate on whether three or four days passed before Croesus showed Solon round the treasury, to relate the narrative of Croesus on the pyre and his divine salvation in accusative and infinitive, or to throw in a casual reference to Persian sources in

introducing the dreams that caused the Persian Wars. In this last case, the indefinite particle *kou*, the lone source attribution and the messy crossover all suggest that we are observing an intrusion of Herodotus *historikos*, but onto a domain that remains firmly and unapologetically that of Herodotus *poietes*. When the narrator so artfully and swiftly moves between two such different voices, it is hardly surprising if, on occasion, he allows them to influence one another.

In conclusion, Herodotus' contrasting narrative personas—which I, following Aristotle's later distinction, call the 'inquirer' and the 'poet'—throw one another into sharp relief. Considering their interaction makes it clear that the standards of factual truth and source interrogation so characteristic of Herodotus the inquirer are not those of the entirety of the *Histories*. The complex mosaic of narrative styles on display in the work is so deftly constructed that the shifts in the narrator's persona—and the accompanying conceptions of truth—are easy to overlook. Identifying the extreme stylistic tendencies visible in the *Histories* can illuminate those more confusing passages that seem to operate with different standards of evidence, and alert us to the deeper lessons of the *Histories* that can elude the reader who focuses exclusively on Herodotus the inquirer.

It seems that Herodotus approaches questions like the nature of the historical process and the nature of human life most naturally in a more indirect style, which he seems to have learned from earlier poetic authors. By the standards of Herodotus the inquirer, of course, the *Histories'* many mimetic narratives and speeches have little claim to authority: they rarely receive direct authorial endorsement and seem to use an inferior standard when it comes to the collection and presentation of evidence. But this should not blind us to the fact that Herodotus has another more subtle way of imbuing a passage, speech or narrative with authority and importance—through networks of allusions, repetitions, careful structural placement and endorsement in the subsequent narrative—and that some of the passages emphasised in this way contain the most significant messages of the work.

Notes

- 1 Translations are my own, except where indicated. I use the variant spellings *historie* (Ionic) and *historia* (Attic) according to the dialect of the author/text under discussion. I would like to thank the editors Lisa Hau and Ian Ruffell for their many helpful comments, and Jonathan Katz for long ago introducing me to the themes that underlie this paper.
- 2 Cic., *de leg.* 1.5; Vives (1990, 316–17) calls Herodotus *mendaciorum patrem*. The substance of the allegation was very old: Aelius Harpocration is said to have authored a work, *On Herodotus' Lies*, although Plutarch's *On the Malignity of*

Herodotus is the only surviving representative of the extensive anti-Herodotus literature of antiquity. For a sketch of the debate over Herodotus' veracity see Momigliano (1957, 1966), Evans (1968), Bichler and Rollinger (2000, 124–32), Kliege-Biller (2004), Olivieri (2004).

- 3 I use the term 'fictional' for any narrative in which important details are freely shaped by the author (although the narrative might well be based around commonly accepted or plausible events). Scholarly consensus is that Herodotus composed his own speeches: see de Bakker (2007, 13) for bibliography. The evidence of section 'The Mimetic Persona' (below) lends significant support to this reading.
- 4 This aspect of the *Histories* was, however, by no means ignored in the early-modern period: Joachim Camerarius (1541, α4^r), for instance, argued that Herodotean *historia* is not compromised by its inclusion of *fabulae*: such fabulous stories provide the reader with two crucial aspects of history—*voluptas* and *utilitas*—and their fictional elaborations are unobjectionable as long as they are placed within a solid factual framework and advance a useful pedagogical message; for Camerarius' reading of Herodotus see Ellis (2016b). Likewise François Geinoz's second defence of Herodotus argued that the work was an 'ouvrage morale' based around the exposition of a moral philosophy, see Geinoz (1802 [1754], 571–9, esp. 578–9).
- 5 De Bakker (2007, 7–9, 21–2) argues that Herodotus uses two narrative personae, one resembling the Homeric narrator and the other resembling the Hippocratic narrator; de Jong (2004), 107, concludes that 'the Herodotean narrator has the *persona* of a historian, poses as an epideictic speaker, and allows himself the liberties of an epic singer'; Griffiths (1999) touches most closely though briefly on the topics discussed here, using the metaphor of 'changing gear' to describe the move between factual or Rankean 'WEEG' (wie-es-eigentlich-gewesen) narrative and 'fictional' narrative (or between the 'mundane and the mythical'); Marincola (1987, 131–6) contrasts Herodotus' practice in book two with the *mimesis* elsewhere in the work.
- 6 Brock (2003); Thomas (2000, 235–48); Fowler (1996); Dewald (1987).
- 7 Marincola (1987).
- 8 Chiasson (2003); Lesky (1977); Rieks (1975); Stahl (1968); Fohl (1913).
- 9 Armayor (1978); Huber (1965); Steinger (1957).
- 10 For discussions of this see n. 5 (above) and n. 12 (below).
- 11 See, e.g., Boedeker (2002).
- 12 For the exceptional nature of the Egyptian and Scythian *logoi*, see, e.g., Bauer (1878, 46–60), Fornara (1971, 3, 18–19). Marincola (1987, 121–3) observes that twenty-eight of Herodotus' forty-two 'specific statements of autopsy and inquiry' are found in the Egyptian *logos*.
- 13 Fowler (1996), in establishing Herodotus' 'voiceprint', notes many features included in this section (though Fowler discusses the *Histories* as a whole). The purpose of this part of my paper is to firmly establish the narratorial persona in specific sections of the work, to enable comparison with other sections: some repetition is thus unavoidable. I also draw heavily on Marincola (1987).
- 14 See also 2.3.1 (goes to Thebes and Heliopolis); 50.1; 54.2 (represents himself asking his sources about their sources, and reports reply); 91.5 (represents himself asking his sources to explain their claims).
- 15 Herodotus gives us the names of the priestesses of Dodona with whom he spoke: Promeneia, Timarete and Nikandre (2.55.3). See also 2.13.1 (evidence of

the priests of Thebes); 32.1–33.1 (the report of Etearchus the Ammonian, reported by the Cyreneans); 91.3 (the people of Chemmis).

- 16 See also the evaluation of the sources of the Egyptian priests and the quality of their evidence about Menelaus: 2.118.1, 119.3 (ἀτρεκέως ἐπιστάμενοι); cf. 2.28.2.
- 17 E.g. 2.45.2: ἔμοι μέν νυν δοκέουσι ταῦτα λέγοντες τῆς Αἰγυπτίων φύσις καὶ τῶν νόμων πάμπαν ἀπειρώς ἔχειν οἱ Ἕλληνες. Cf. 2.2.5–3.1 (criticises a Greek story); 28.1–2 (suggests a source was joking); 45.1. It has long been suspected that ‘the Greeks’ refers to authors who wrote on Egypt before Herodotus, particularly Hecataeus—see Marincola (1987, 123).
- 18 Three of the six occurrences of *tekmerion* are in book two: 2.13.1, 2.43.2, 2.58.
- 19 See also 2.43.1 (no information on the other Heracles in Egypt); 73.1 (Hdt. has never seen the phoenix, except in paintings); 156 (Hdt. has never seen the island of Chemmis move around). The latter two may not be the humble admissions they seem—they undermine Hecataeus, who had made both claims (*FGrH* 1 F 324a and 305). See Marincola (1987, 126).
- 20 See also 2.28.1 (retrospective); 33.1 (nominally retrospective—although the story in fact continues); 40.1 (prospective); 93.6 (retrospective).
- 21 See also 46.1 (ref. to 42.1); 145.2 (ref. to 43.4: on Heracles’ age).
- 22 See also 2.55.1 (distinguishing information from the Theban priests and the prophetesses of Dodona); 146.1–2.
- 23 See also 2.3.2; 33.1; 47.2.
- 24 See, however, Darbo-Peschanski in this volume on similarities between the Herodotean narrator and the Sophoclean portrayal of Oedipus.
- 25 Though Fowler (1996, 86) suggests that the self-consciousness of Herodotus’ performance might have been anticipated by Hecataeus. Fowler focuses on those aspects of Herodotean narration that I designate ‘historical’, but does acknowledge the existence of ‘straight narrative’, i.e. sections that lack the historian’s voice (1996, 76).
- 26 Here too the author’s presence is clear throughout: his conclusions are explicitly presented as his own, and backed up by reference to proofs and reasoning. Particularly relevant are his common use of signposting—both prospective (at the start of 7, 8, 10, 12, 14.20) and retrospective (at the end of 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14.20, 19.1); his stress on proof (e.g. *tekmerion*: 9, 16.34); self-conscious abridgement (12); and rhetorical questions (14.22–4). Many have compared Herodotus with this treatise, e.g. Fehling (1989, 28), comparing section 20 with Hdt. 3.12.
- 27 Steisichorus’ *Palinode* (cf. Pl. *Phaedr.* 243a, Dio Chrysostom *Or.* 11.40) and Euripides’ *Helen*. On the latter, see Wright, this volume.
- 28 Luraghi (2006), 86. Contrast Ford (2002), 148, who elides an important difference between the nature of what is found in Homer’s narrative and this Herodotean passage.
- 29 Herodotus does suggest that there are traces revealing that Homer knew the alternative story, thereby showing his familiarity with interpretation by *hyponoia*, as argued by Sammons (2012).
- 30 See Ford (2002, 149–50), who stresses the frequency with which such views emerge from ‘enlightened thinkers’ of the fifth century.
- 31 See Periander’s *historie* (1.24.7), and the test he devises to discover whether Arion is telling the truth. On ἱστορίη in Greek literature and Herodotus, see

Fowler (2006).

- 32 For the importance of these dialogues in the structure of the *Histories* see Ellis (2015b, 22–3).
- 33 Plu., *Mor.* 857f–858a; see Bischoff (1932), Lattimore (1939).
- 34 See Moles (1996). For the tendency to put these at the focus of the analysis of Herodotus’ theology and conception of history since the eighteenth century, see Ellis (2016a).
- 35 Anything but a new interpretation; see, e.g., Fornara (1971, 18–20, 77–80). A number of scholars on Greek religion have recently argued that divine *phthonos*, divine *nemesis*, ‘the circle of human affairs’, and the transience of human prosperity etc. have much less conceptual coherence than generally believed: e.g. J. Gould (1989, 79–82), Versnel (2011, 181–8, 534). I question this latter view in Ellis (2015a).
- 36 Once just after they leave Sardis (7.42.2), once when the Persian force attacks Delphi (8.37–8). Artabanus’ comments about the dangers of storms and starvation (in conversation with Xerxes: 7.49.2–3) are also realised in the subsequent narrative (7.188–92, 8.12, 8.115.2–3).
- 37 Solon: ἐπιστάμενόν με τὸ θεῖον πᾶν ἐὼν φθονερόν τε καὶ παραχῶδες ἐπειρωτᾶς (1.32.1). Amasis: ἐμοὶ . . . τὸ θεῖον ἐπισταμένῳ ὥς ἔστι φθονερόν . . . (3.40.2–3); cf. 1.5.4.
- 38 ὁ Πολυκράτης διεφθάρη κακῶς, οὔτε ἑωυτοῦ ἀξίως οὔτε τῶν ἑωυτοῦ φρονημάτων (3.125).
- 39 ὅκου γὰρ ἰθύσειε στρατεύεσθαι, πάντα οἱ ἐχώρει εὐτυχέως (3.39.3).
- 40 ὅκη γὰρ ἰθύσειε στρατεύεσθαι Κῦρος, ἀμήχανον ἦν ἐκεῖνο τὸ ἔθνος διαφυγεῖν (1.204.2: ‘Wherever Cyrus desired to campaign, that people was helpless to escape’).
- 41 Solon to Croesus: 1.32.9; Amasis to Polycrates: 3.40.3; Leotychides to the Athenian (telling the story of Glaucus): 6.86.8.
- 42 1.32.4 πᾶν ἔστι ἄνθρωπος συμφορῇ; cf. 35.1, 35.4, 41.1, 42.1, 44.2, 45.1, with climax at 45.3 (βαρυσυμφορώτατος). For a close study of this and other details see Chiasson (2003, 14–15).
- 43 7.46.3, cf. the wider associations of these ideas in Greek literature: I give several examples in Ellis (2015b, 19 and n. 4).
- 44 Croesus initially frames his question to Solon in terms of *olbos* (1.30.2), but this has been replaced by *eudaimonie* by the time he confronts Solon at 1.32.1. Solon, however, continues in terms of *olbos* (1.32.5, 6, 7, 9). The words seem to denote the same set of ideas in opposition to *eutukhie* (cf. 1.32.8).
- 45 εὖεστοί is the reading of Laurentianus Plut. 70.3 (manuscript A) and most editions, though the Roman family (d) reads εὐθηνίᾳ (a term with similar meaning: ‘prosperity’, ‘abundance’).
- 46 This represents the accusative–infinitive construction within which this piece is set—although no particular source is given (see discussion in the fourth part of the paper, below).
- 47 Note, however, that this section is omitted in the manuscripts of the Roman family, and hence by most critical editions.
- 48 Chiasson (2003), Pelling (2006b).
- 49 Solon: 1.32.5; Amasis: 3.40.2; Artabanus: 7.46.4; Hermoclydes: 9.17.4; Athenians: 9.27.3.

- 50 Two further examples from Artabanus at 7.18.3.
- 51 *Il.* 11.157, 14.415; A., *Pers.* 812; S., *El.* 512, 765; E., *Hipp.* 684 (cf. Ar., *Ra.* 587). For its use in botanical discussion see Arist., *HA* 616a2.
- 52 Xerxes says, 'I shall burn Athens' (πυρώσω τὰς Ἀθήνας, 7.8.2), and he repeats the word later (the only other attestation in the *Histories*: 8.102.3). In the fifth century πυρώω otherwise only occurs in tragedy (some 18 times, e.g. E., *Phoen.* 575, Θήβας πυρώσας) and in Pindar (*P.* 11.33). Elsewhere Herodotus uses more prosaic compounds of πίμπρημι (forty-one times in all). See Chiasson (1979, 89–90).
- 53 Cf. 7.11.4. S. *Ai.* 1292 (Πέλοπα βάρβαρον Φρύγα) may be the only surviving support of Strabo's assertion that 'the poets, particularly the tragedians, mix up the [different] peoples, for example the Trojans, Mysians, and Lydians, whom they call Phrygians, and likewise the Lycians whom they call Carians' (οἱ ποιηταὶ δὲ μάλιστα οἱ τραγικοὶ συγχέοντες τὰ ἔθνη, καθάπερ τοὺς Τρῶας καὶ τοὺς Μυσοὺς καὶ τοὺς Λυδοὺς Φρύγας προσαγορεύουσιν, οὕτω καὶ τοὺς Λυκίους Κᾶρας, 14.3.3). Bacchylides makes the same conflation (8.31), but Pindar has Pelops as a Lydian (*Ol.* 1.24, 9.9). The periphrastic ethnic reference recalls another Herodotean poetic formula, 'sons of the x', which is also familiar from Homer ('sons of the Achaeans', e.g. *Il.* 1.162, 237) and Aeschylus ('sons of the Greeks', *Pers.* 402–3). In Herodotus it appears only in direct speech of epic tone and in cited poetry: in the mouth of Croesus ('the children of the Lydians', 1.27.3, next to the Homeric hapax αἰ γάρ) and of the Ethiopian king (3.21.3), in a pre-battle speech (5.49.2) and in an elegiac inscription (5.77.4).
- 54 Cf. Solon 14.2 W; Theog. 168, 616, 850; S. *OC.* 869.
- 55 Similarly hyperbolic rhetoric is used by Aristagoras in attempting to persuade the Spartans (5.49.7), apparently also repeated in Athens (5.97.1–2). A tragic parallel is *PV* 88 ὦ δῖος αἰθῆρ (where δῖος is often interpreted as an adjective but is open to both interpretations), but 'Zeus' *aither* is also Homeric (*Il.* 2.412, 4.167; *Od.* 15.524).
- 56 Usually interpreted as a quotation of A., *Pers.* 50: ζυγὸν ἀμφιβαλεῖν δούλιον Ἑλλάδι (the image of the 'yoke' is frequently used, e.g. 72, 196, 594). A Sophoclean fragment is almost as close: βόσκει δὲ τοὺς μὲν μοῖρα δυσαμερίας, / τοὺς δ' ὀλβος ἡμῶν, τοὺς δὲ δουλεί-/ας ζυγὸν ἔσχεν ἀνάγκας. (fr. 571.5–7).
- 57 Note the initial asyndeton. Tragic parallels are E., fr. 1052 (ὀρᾷς τὸν εὐτράπεζον ὡς ἡδὺς βίος | ὃ τ' ὀλβος ἔξωθέν τίς ἐστι πραγμάτων) and S., *Ant.* 712–13 (ὀρᾷς παρὰ ρέιθροισι χειμάρροισι ὅσα | δένδρων ὑπέικει, κλῶνας ὡς ἐκώζετται); cf. Xen. *Mem.* 3.4.3.
- 58 Sandanes to Croesus: τοῦτο δέ, ἦν νικηθῆς, μάθε ὅσα ἀγαθὰ ἀποβαλέεις (1.71.3); Croesus to Cyrus: ἐκεῖνο πρῶτον μάθε ὡς κύκλος τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων ἐστὶ πρηγμάτων, περιφερόμενος δὲ (1.207.2); Artabanus to Xerxes: μάθε ὅτι αἱ συμφοραὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀρχοῦσι καὶ οὐκὶ ὠνθρωποι τῶν συμφορέων (7.49.3).
- 59 See Avery (1979) for references. In the *Histories* the word occurs fifteen times, of which three are in the Persian war council (Artabanus: 7.10.η.1; Mardonius: 7.9.γ.1; narrator: 7.18.4), three in the culmination of Croesus' downfall (Croesus: 1.87.3, 90.3, 90.4) and two in the course of the campaign that leads to Cyrus' death (1.204.2, 212.2).
- 60 Stein cites Helen's reproach to Aphrodite (*Il.* 3.409) as a parallel: ἀλλ' αἰεὶ περὶ κεῖνον οἷζε καὶ ἐφύλασσε, / εἰς ὃ κέ σ' ἢ ἄλοχον ποιήσεται ἢ ὃ γε δούλην. Compare also S., *OT* 1098 and 1101.

- 61 1.207.1. See A., Ag. 176.
- 62 *Il.* 1.4–5: αὐτοὺς δὲ ἐλώρια τεῦχε κύνεσσιν / οἰωνοῖσι τε πᾶσι, Διὸς δ' ἐτελείετο βουλή, cf. *Il.* 24.411; S., *Aj.* 830; E., *Hec.* 1078–9.
- 63 Stein (1883–94) ad loc.: ‘seltsam aber daß H. den Perser gerade diejenige Todesart als die unseligste voraussetzen läßt, die, nach seinem eigenen Zeugnisse . . . , jedem Avestagläubigen vielmehr die erwünschteste und allein gottgefällige sein mußte’. Cf. 1.140: τάδε μέντοι ὡς κρυπτόμενα λέγεται καὶ οὐ σαφηνέως περὶ τοῦ ἀποθανόντος, ὡς οὐ πρότερον θάπτεται ἀνδρὸς Πέρσεω ὁ νέκυς πρὶν ἂν ὑπ' ὄρνιθος ἢ κυνὸς ἐλκυσθῇ. Μάγους μὲν γὰρ ἀτρεκέως οἶδα ταῦτα ποιεῦντας.
- 64 See nn. 34–5 (above).
- 65 Cf. *Rhet.* 1386b; *Pl.*, *Tim.* 29e, *Phdr.* 247a7. Confusion inevitably arises from the tendency in both authors to label theology of which they disapprove as ‘poetic’, since Xenophanes had used hexameters to criticise Homeric and Hesiodic theology in a way that anticipates aspects of Platonic thought (e.g. Xenoph. fr. 11 and 12 D–K), while Herodotus expresses a quintessentially ‘poetic’ theology in prose. Plato, however, seems not to have been the first with this idea: the notion of the ‘lies of the poets’ goes back to Solon (fr. 29 W) and Euripides (*HF* 1345–6). For an overview of divine *phthonos* in historiographical thought after Plato, see Ellis (2015b).
- 66 However, Kurke (2011, 122) has recently argued that Aristotle has Herodotus in mind. For the tension in Aristotle between the doctrine of divine goodness and his appreciation of tragedy on its own terms see T. Gould (1990, xx–xxiii).
- 67 On this see Immerwahr (1966, 4–5), who suggests that Aristotle is talking about ‘tendencies’ rather than absolute definitions. It is, however, noteworthy that when Aristotle talks of Ἡρόδοτος ὁ μυθολόγος (*GA* 756b5, cf. *HA* 579b2) and *Erodotos fabularum scriptor* (fr. 248 Rose) his focus is on the historian’s factual errors (i.e. the reproduction of fish and lions, the flooding of the Nile) and not those instances where Herodotus gives free reign to his creative faculties. Aristotle’s judgement in the *Poetics* is an evaluation of Herodotus’ *aims* (in the Egyptian *logos* and similar episodes), while those just mentioned are a criticism of his frequent *failure* to live up to this standard. For the context see Schmid (1934, 664–6).
- 68 Fornara (1971, 21–3): ‘Book II . . . reveals Herodotus’ basic interest in history and his natural inclination to research, the making of inquiries. But it is the work of a younger man not yet in control of the techniques or in possession of the mental attitudes of the author of Book I.’
- 69 Marincola (1987, 136) sees two factors that prompt Herodotus to narrate book two in a very different style: first, the presence of pre-existing accounts of Egypt (by comparison to the topic of the Persian Wars, which was not, as far as we know, covered in any comparable account before Herodotus); second, the fact that the tool of autopsy is much better suited to ethnography and geography than to events of the distant past. While both considerations are important, the swift variations within accounts of the distant past in book one suggests that other factors are at work. Cf. Thomas (2000, 200–212).
- 70 Cf. the proem’s account of Phoenician traders who abduct Io and some of her handmaids: they had put in to Argos and were selling their wares, when ‘on the fifth or sixth day’ the girls came down to have a look (1.1.3).
- 71 The example at 1.30.2 certainly does not indicate Croesus’ lack of accuracy and foolishness by contrast to Solon’s numerical competence, *pace* Long (1987, 69). Aly (1921, 38) notes that the three- or four-day interval is typical of folk stories,

- although, as the examples above show, the precise numbers vary in Herodotus.
- 72 2.181.1; cf. Baragwanath (2008, 126). Other examples of this formula (all in the narrator's voice) are: 1.19.2 (on Alyattes' motives); 1.61.1 (on Megacles' motives in the digression on Athens); 1.86.2 (on Cyrus' motives for putting Croesus on the pyre); 1.191.1 (on Cyrus' motives); 6.134.2 (on Miltiades' motives); 9.91.1 (on Leotychides' motives).
- 73 On that passage see Pelling (2006b, 160), particularly the ὅμμος that seems to echo *Il.* 24.480–84.
- 74 De Jong (2004, 110).
- 75 Chiasson (2003, 30).
- 76 Marincola (1987, 136).
- 77 Chiasson (2003, 29–30).
- 78 Chiasson (2003, 27–8 and n. 78).
- 79 On the vexed reception of the theme of divine deception in Herodotus see Ellis (2015c, 204–6) for some examples from the early-modern period and Roettig (2010) for later academic responses.

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7 *Se non è vero*

On the Use of Untrue Stories in Herodotus

Katharina Wesselmann

In his masterful reflection on truth and lying, *A True Story*, Lucian describes a visit to a horrible underworld where screaming sinners are tormented. After giving a graphic description of the place, he starts naming some of the damned souls:

καὶ μεγίστας ἀπασῶν τιμωρίας ὑπέμενον οἱ ψευδάμενοί τι παρὰ τὸν βίον καὶ οἱ μὴ τὰ ἀληθῆ συγγεγραφότες, ἐν οἷς καὶ Κτησίας ὁ Κνίδιος ἦν καὶ Ἡρόδοτος καὶ ἄλλοι πολλοί. τούτους οὖν ὁρῶν ἐγὼ χρηστὰς εἶχον εἰς τοῦπιόν τὰς ἐλπίδας· οὐδὲν γὰρ ἑμαυτῷ ψεῦδος εἰπόντι συνηπιστάμην.

The severest punishment of all fell to those who told lies while in life and those who had written what was not true, among whom were Ctesias of Cnidos, Herodotus and many more. On seeing them, I had good hopes for the future, for I have never told a lie that I know of.

Lucian, *VH* 2.31¹

Herodotus, the liar, who wrote ‘what was not true’, has been damned by several of his critics, and not always as jokingly as by Lucian.² But at least at first glance, the accusation of lying must seem surprising to a reader of the *Histories*. Herodotus seems to be especially scrupulous about reporting the truth, or at least, if the truth cannot be found out, all extant versions of his sources.³ His habit of giving several possible versions of a story and then adding his own opinion about the truth, untruth, plausibility or lack thereof, sometimes even regarding small details,⁴ creates the overall impression of integrity and reliability while at the same time allowing for the possibility of an honest mistake. This method famously and programmatically starts out with the women’s rape stories at the very beginning of the work, where Herodotus confronts the reader with a refusal: he will not decide between the Persian and the Phoenician versions, but rather tell that which he actually knows (1.5.3). So why tell the unverifiable stories at all? It is not so much the discussion of varying reports that strikes the modern reader as odd, but the fact that Herodotus includes reports in his narrative that he explicitly deems unknowable, or even untrue.⁵ Why should he even include a story, much less, discuss it, after

already having decided that it is false?

There are of course the famous passages where Herodotus claims to simply report everything that is said: ‘my rule in this history is that I record what is said by all as I have heard it’ (2.123.1: ἐμοὶ δὲ παρὰ πάντα τὸν λόγον ὑπόκειται ὅτι τὰ λεγόμενα ὑπ’ ἐκάστων ἀκοῇ γράφω), or ‘I do not know whether this is true; I just write what is said’ (4.195.2: ταῦτα εἰ μὲν ἔστι ἀληθῆως οὐκ οἶδα, τὰ δὲ λέγεται γράφω), or ‘as for myself, although it is my business to set down that which is told to me, to believe it is none at all of my business. This I ask the reader to hold true for the whole of my history’ (7.152.3: ἐγὼ δὲ ὀφείλω λέγειν τὰ λεγόμενα, πείθεσθαι γε μὲν οὐ παντάπασιν ὀφείλω (καὶ μοι τοῦτο τὸ ἔπος ἐχέτω ἐς πάντα τὸν λόγον)).⁶

It would be very easy to accept this pursuit of completeness as a universal reason to include all versions of all stories. And maybe completeness is actually one of Herodotus’ motivations. After all, some of the stories that he reports were current in his time and known to his audience (sometimes we have, or at least know of, other contemporary sources⁷); it is very likely that in some cases Herodotus just did not wish to appear unaware of these variants.

However, it would do the author of the *Histories* little justice if we were to view his work as a mere accumulation of everything he has heard, however nonsensical it may be. And even the image of a diligent and prudent accumulator of *logoi*, who ‘did his best to compare and combine, though naturally he was not always successful in uniting divergent traditions’,⁸ seems patronising and anachronistic.

Therefore, other possible motivations of including mutually exclusive, and even untrue, versions of a story should be taken into consideration. Some of these motives are more obvious than others, I think, but in a number of cases, we have to conclude that we ‘cannot clearly decide’, as does Herodotus sometimes (for example in 1.172.1: τοῦτο γὰρ οὐκ ἔχω ἀτρεκέως διακρίναι). Still, without speculating too much about ‘the author’s intention’, it is worth taking a closer look at some of the effects that presenting a variety of possibilities can have on the recipient.

In this paper, I shall explore a number of such effects. At first, I shall deal with the phenomenon of impartiality that is suggested by the inclusion of a story that one does not actually believe. The display of varying versions may illustrate the political stances of the parties transmitting the respective versions, so, for the sake of objectivity, both sides have to be heard, even the untrue stories. In some of these

cases, Herodotus seems to have an opinion on what is true and what is not, but claims that he does not want to decide which version is true. However, the recipient is manipulated towards one or the other. Thus, the main purpose of including the untrue version seems to be to underline the narrator's integrity—without compromising factuality by endorsing an untrue or less plausible version.

Other reasons to tell an untrue story may be founded on a certain value in the untrue story, for which it deserves to be told; this could be *poikilia*, in that the story adds to the narrative on an entertainment level, or a kind of 'non-factual truth', in that the false story may contain another level of truth beyond factuality, for example a kind of behaviour that is typical for the protagonists. Finally, the combination as such might be important: by adding untrue versions to the factually true one, a narrative analogy of the situation's complexity is created, opening up a larger panorama of aspects than could be provided by mere facts.

A few examples will help to illustrate these functions of non-factual stories in the *Histories*. We shall find that Herodotus is genuinely interested in the question of whether a story is true or not,⁹ but that he finds value in the false versions, too—in accordance with the narrative traditions he is used to: mutually exclusive threads of plot are simultaneously used in the Homeric epics as well, to similar ends, as will be shown in the last section of this paper.

(Apparent) Impartiality

For a historiographer, telling different versions of one story, and therefore showing different sides, can be a handy rhetorical device to prove his own impartiality, and indeed, Herodotus sometimes tells us explicitly that he has no preference for one version or the other. However, this does not always ring true: at a closer examination of the text, he seems to discreetly mark the versions with the better or worse claim to truth.

There is, for example, the story of the god Zalmoxis worshipped by the Thracian Getae (4.94–6). Herodotus first describes their ritual. In the following passage he gives a Greek report¹⁰ of how the cult of Zalmoxis came about: Zalmoxis was a human, who had been sold as a slave to Pythagoras. When he became free, he went back to his tribe and tricked everyone into believing in reincarnation by secretly spending three years in a subterranean chamber and then reappearing. In the last passage, Herodotus expresses his doubts about the

malicious Greek version: 'I neither disbelieve nor entirely believe the tale about the underground chamber' (ἐγὼ δὲ περὶ μὲν [τούτου καὶ] τοῦ καταγαίου οἰκήματος οὔτε ἀπιστέω οὔτε ὦν πιστεύω τι λίην) —on chronological grounds, since he thinks that Zalmoxis lived long before Pythagoras—and then ends with the statement that he will not discuss further whether Zalmoxis is a god or not: 'as to whether there was a man called Zalmoxis or this is some deity native to the Getae, let the question be dismissed' (4.96.1: εἴτε δὲ ἐγένετό τις Σάλμοξις ἄνθρωπος, εἴτ' ἐστὶ δαίμων τις Γέτησι οὗτος ἐπιχώριος, χαίρω). However, it seems that Herodotus is in favour of the Greek rationalising explanation. The first passage that describes the ritual of the Getae is pointedly marked as secondary focalisation (νομίζουσι / ὀνομάζουσι / τοῖσι . . . δοκέει / αἰτιῶνται . . . φάμενοι . . . αἰτησάμενοι / νομίζοντες),¹¹ whereas the passage with the Greek version is not; even the infinitive constructions marking it as indirect speech are given up mid-passage. Also, Herodotus expresses his doubts about the Greek version reluctantly and seems to have problems only with the chronology.¹²

Another case is Herodotus' narrative of the conflict between Croton and Sybaris (5.44–6).¹³ The Sybarites claim that the Crotoniates were only able to conquer them because they had help from the Spartan prince Dorieus. The Crotoniates deny this: they say that they did not have any help, apart from the Sybarite seer Callias, who changed over to their side and told them that the oracles were unfavourable for Sybaris. Both parties cite (in part rather unconvincing) evidence for their version: the Sybarites claim that Dorieus established a sanctuary for Athena after taking Sybaris, and also that he died later, which in their opinion was clearly punishment for taking a detour from his own divinely commanded colonisation plans when aiding Croton. The Crotoniates, however, claim that they gave plots of land to Callias and his descendants, but none to Dorieus, so it is obvious that the latter did not help them.

The different versions are very clearly motivated. The Sybarites cannot admit that the Crotoniates could have conquered them on their own, and the Crotoniates do not want to see their glory diminished. Herodotus does not decide here; he does not seem to care much for the historical truth: 'this, then, is the evidence brought forward by each party, and each may side with that which seems to him to deserve more credence' (5.45.2: ταῦτα μὲν νυν ἑκάτεροι αὐτῶν μαρτύρια ἀποφαίνονται· καὶ πάρεστι, ὁκοτέροισί τις πεῖθεται αὐτῶν, τούτοισι προσχωρεῖν). However, there seems to be a certain tendency towards the Crotoniates' variant, because he confirms that the plots of land given to Callias were still in the possession of his

A third example may be the account of the Argives' Medising (7.148–52). Herodotus gives both the Argive version and a version that is told 'all over Greece' (7.150.1: λεγόμενος ἀνὰ τὴν Ἑλλάδα). The Argives claim that an oracle had warned them against joining the Greek confederation against Persia, but that they still would have done it, had Sparta guaranteed them thirty years of peace and an equally shared command of the confederation. But when Sparta insolently offered them only a third of the power (their king as an equal to each of the two Spartan kings), they had to decline. This is different from the 'confederate' version, that the Persian king had already recruited Argos as an ally, and that the Argives never once intended to side with Greece and therefore made demands that they knew the Spartans would not yield to. Also, there is another story corroborating the claim that the Argives have ingratiated themselves with the Persian king: years later, under the reign of Artaxerxes, Athenian messengers at the Persian court in Sousa are witness to a confirmation of the friendship between Argos and Persia.

These are heavy accusations, but Herodotus tones them down with the famous passage cited partly above (7.152), appearing as an utterly fair and objective narrator:

εἰ μὲν νυν ζέρξης τε ἀπέπεμψε ταῦτα λέγοντα κήρυκα ἐς Ἄργος καὶ Ἀργείων ἄγγελοι ἀναβάντες ἐς Σοῦσα ἐπειρώτων Ἀρτοξέρξην περὶ φιλίας, οὐκ ἔχω ἀτρεκέως εἰπεῖν, οὐδὲ τινα γνώμην περὶ αὐτῶν ἀποφαίνομαι ἄλλην γε ἢ τὴν περ αὐτοὶ Ἀργεῖοι λέγουσι. Ἐπίσταμαι δὲ τοσοῦτο, ὅτι, εἰ πάντες ἄνθρωποι τὰ οἰκίῃα κακὰ ἐς μέσον συνενεΐκαιεν ἀλλάξασθαι βουλόμενοι τοῖσι πλησίοισι, ἐγκύψαντες ἂν ἐς τὰ τῶν πέλας κακὰ ἀσπασίως ἕκαστοι αὐτῶν ἀποφεροῖατο ὀπίσω τὰ ἐσηνεύκοντο. οὕτω [δὴ] οὐδ' Ἀργεῖοι αἰσχίστα πεποιήται. Ἐγὼ δὲ ὀφείλω λέγειν τὰ λεγόμενα, πείθεσθαι γε μὲν οὐ παντάπασιν ὀφείλω (καὶ μοι τοῦτο τὸ ἔπος ἐχέτω ἐς πάντα τὸν λόγον) ἐπεὶ καὶ ταῦτα λέγεται, ὥς ἄρα Ἀργεῖοι ἦσαν οἱ ἐπικαλεσάμενοι τὸν Πέρσῃ ἐπὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα, ἐπειδὴ σφι πρὸς τοὺς Λακεδαιμονίους κακῶς ἢ αἰχμὴ ἐστήκεε, πᾶν δὴ βουλόμενοι σφίσι εἶναι πρὸ τῆς παρεούσης λύτης.

Now, whether it is true that Xerxes sent a herald with such a message to Argos, and that the Argive envoys came up to Sousa and questioned Artaxerxes about their friendship, I cannot say with exactness, nor do I offer any other opinion than the one the Argives themselves express. This, however, I know full well, namely if all men should carry their own private troubles to market for barter with their neighbours, there would not be a single one who, when he had looked into the troubles of other men, would not be glad to carry home again what he had brought. The conduct of the Argives was accordingly not utterly shameful. As for myself, although it is my business to set down that which is told me, to believe it is none at all of my business (this I ask the reader to hold true for the whole of my history), for there is another tale current, according to which it would seem that it was the Argives who invited the Persians into

Hellas, because the war with the Lacedaemonians was going badly, and they would prefer anything to their present distresses.

Herodotus' comment may convey complete fairness and impartiality, even a slight pro-Argive tendency ('nor do I offer any other opinion than the one the Argives themselves express'), but it is surprising that he ends with the gravest accusation of all: after the recipient has been soothed by the *gnome* about human misfortune and by putting the Argives' crime into perspective¹⁵—if they really have medised, which, as is clearly stated, cannot be decided at all—Herodotus suddenly drops a bombshell of an idea: that the Argives could actually be responsible for the Persian Wars as such. Herodotus does not believe this, as we know, because he has already told us the complex genesis of the conflict in book five. However, he leaves the accusation uncommented here, and it can be understood on two levels: certainly on a literal level, 'I do not believe everything although one does hear a lot of things—there is *even* the completely absurd story of the Argives initiating the Persian Wars', but also on a taunting level of audience manipulation—'at the end of the day, who knows what they are capable of?' *Semper aliquid haeret*, and so the excuse of the Argives becomes less plausible against the rumours about their defection, especially since the latter are supported by the story from Artoxerxes' Sousa court.

In all these cases, the mutually exclusive versions, some of which must logically be false, serve to underline Herodotus' impartiality as a narrator.¹⁶ He cites them and refuses to decide if they are true or not, so that his authority as an impartial annalist is confirmed—but he does care enough about the factual truth that he somehow manages to give that judgement after all, albeit in a discreet and implicit manner.

Se non è vero . . .

The second effect that including an untrue story can have is what in Italian is described with the phrase *se non è vero, è ben trovato*—'if it is not true, it is cleverly invented'. These untrue stories have a value as such, even though they may be lies. The most obvious case is the value of spicing up the narrative in terms of *poikilia*, with the anecdotes, true or untrue, increasing the level of entertainment. Herodotus, it seems, does not like to miss out on a great story (although it is of course very wrong to reduce him to this quality).

The Scythian *logos* is a good example of this. There are quite a lot of colourful stories, beginning with the origin of the Scythians, for which

Herodotus gives several possibilities (4.5–13). The first version is the Scythians' own: they are descendants of Targitaos, the first man to live in the then still desolate region, a son of Zeus and a river nymph. Herodotus explicitly states that he does not believe this (ἐμοὶ μὲν οὐ πιστά, 4.5.1), but then continues with the Scythian version: Targitaos had three sons, who were the ancestors of the three Scythian tribes. When several gold objects miraculously fell from the sky, the youngest son was the only one who could touch them, while his elders brothers got burned by the gold. This is why the youngest son became king.

The second version that Herodotus cites, without commenting on its truth or untruth, is a Greek myth: on his way through the land that is now Scythia, Heracles' horses were stolen by a creature, half woman and half snake, who told him she would only give the horses back if he slept with her. She then delayed his departure until she had borne him three sons. Heracles told her that the son who would one day bend his bow and wear his belt would be king. This turned out to be the youngest, Scythes; he became ancestor of the Scythians, whereas the other two sons had to leave the country.¹⁷

The third version that Herodotus cites is of a different kind; it is decidedly less mythical,¹⁸ and he comments accordingly: 'there is yet another story, to which account I myself am especially inclined' (4.11.1: ἔστι δὲ καὶ ἄλλος λόγος ἔχων ὧδε, τῷ μάλιστα λεγομένῳ αὐτὸς πρόσκειμαι). This is a relatively realistic migration story, told by 'Greeks and barbarians' (4.12.3): the Scythians were crowded by the Massagetae and invaded the land of the Cimmerians; there is just a small anecdotal excursus about the Cimmerian princes who would not leave their country and instead killed each other. Herodotus supplies a lot of information to confirm this version: the tombs of the princes can still be seen, there is still some Cimmerian heritage in Scythia to be found, the Cimmerians founded a colony in their flight into Asia.

Finally, a last version, told by Aristetas of Proconnesus, is a migration story, too, with the difference that the Scythians were not driven away by the Massagetae, but by the Issedones, as part of a chain reaction: the Issedones had been pushed from their lands by the Arimaspians, and the Scythians would force the Cimmerians to leave. This story is very similar to version three; it is slightly less realistic, as Aristetas mentions Arimaspians and Hyperboreans and gold-guarding griffins as well, but they are not directly connected with the migration story. Herodotus does not comment on the truth of this last version but seems to regard it as a slight variant of the one told before.¹⁹

This seems to be a case where Herodotus takes two (slightly)

different versions seriously, but tells the untrue stories anyway—on account of their entertainment value, although in this case, ‘entertainment’ is probably too light a term for the important mythical traditions of Scythians and Greeks. The mythical stories simply belong to a different category from the historical migration stories, and, seeing that they deal with the actual origin of the Scythians, while the migration stories concentrate on their geographical location, both categories are not even mutually exclusive.²⁰

‘Entertainment’ seems a more fitting term for 4.77, where Herodotus reports a witticism by the Scythian Anacharsis, who had lived among the Greeks and characterises them as follows: ‘that all Greeks were keen for every kind of learning, except the Lacedaemonians; but that these were the only Greeks who spoke and listened with discretion’ (Ἑλληνας πάντας ἀσχόλους εἶναι ἐς πᾶσαν σοφίην πλὴν Λακεδαιμονίων, τούτοις δὲ εἶναι μούνοισι σωφρόνως δοῦναι τε καὶ δέξασθαι λόγον). Herodotus finds it completely unbelievable that Anacharsis should have coined this, saying, ‘but this is a tale pointlessly invented by the Greeks themselves’ (ἀλλ’ οὗτος μὲν ὁ λόγος ἄλλως πέπλασται ὑπ’ αὐτῶν Ἑλλήνων, 4.77.1). Nevertheless, he includes this characterisation of the Greeks—he tells an untrue story without a true version, probably for its anecdotal value.

He does the same in some of the anthropological passages of book four, for example in chapter 25:

οἱ δὲ φαλακροὶ οὗτοι λέγουσι, ἐμοὶ μὲν οὐ πιστὰ λέγοντες, οἰκέειν τὰ ὄρεα αἰγίποδας ἄνδρας, ὑπερβάντι δὲ τούτους ἀνθρώπους ἄλλους οἱ τὴν ἐξάμηνον καθεύδουσι· τοῦτο δὲ οὐκ ἐνδέκομαι ἀρχήν.

These bald men say (although I do not believe them) that the mountains are inhabited by men with goats’ feet, and that beyond these are men who sleep for six months of the twelve. This I cannot accept as true at all.

There is really no need to tell stories that one so blatantly rejects and that are not even alternatives to the truth but pure fiction—apart from the fact that this kind of thing seems to belong to the genre of ancient ethnography;²¹ if anything, it is surprising that Herodotus expresses his scepticism. The normality of these fantastic descriptions becomes clear in 4.191, where Herodotus lists a number of strange creatures:

West of the Triton river and next to the Aseans begins the country of Libyans who cultivate the soil and possess houses; they are called Maxyes; they wear their hair long on the right side of their heads and shave the left, and they paint their bodies with vermilion. These claim descent from the men who came from Troy. Their country, and the rest of the western part of Libya, is much fuller of

wild beasts and more wooded than the country of the nomads. For the eastern region of Libya, which the nomads inhabit, is low-lying and sandy as far as the Triton river; but the land west of this, where the farmers live, is exceedingly mountainous and wooded and full of wild beasts. In that country are the huge snakes and the lions, and the elephants and bears and asps, the horned asses, the dog-headed and the headless men that have their eyes in their chests, as the Libyans say, and the wild men and women, besides many other creatures that are not invented (ἀκατάψευστα).

The last word seems like a joke—‘besides many other creatures that are not invented’ is probably meant as a contrast to everything mentioned so far; should it really mean ‘who are also not invented [just as the ones already mentioned are not invented]’, it must be ironical, considering the previous *caveat* ὡς δὴ λέγονται γε ὑπὸ Λιβύων.²² Clearly, Herodotus finds it amusing or entertaining or necessary for a colourful description of a strange country to include a certain amount of lies—while warning his audience of their unreliability.²³

But the inclusion of a false story can be motivated by more than *poikilia*. As stated above, it may contain another level of truth beyond factuality, such as very typical behaviour that is perfectly captured in a non-factual story that therefore deserves to be included. There is, for example, the story of Cambyses’ motivation to invade Egypt, which Herodotus tells in 3.1–3.²⁴ Version one goes as follows: Cambyses asks Amasis to give him his daughter in marriage. Amasis does not want this, as his daughter will only be a concubine to Cambyses, not the first lady. So he tries to cheat the Persian king by sending him Nitetis, a surviving daughter of his predecessor Apries. The woman tells Cambyses that he has been deceived, and, furious, he decides to invade Egypt.

Herodotus seems rather affirmative towards this version—he introduces the passage with the statement (3.1.1),

ἐπὶ τοῦτον δὴ τὸν Ἄμασιν Καμβύσης ὁ Κύρου ἐστρατεύετο, ἄγων ἄλλους τε τῶν ἥρχε καὶ Ἑλλήνων Ἴωνάς τε καὶ Αἰολέας, δι’ αἰτίην τοιήνδε.

Cyrus’ son Cambyses was leading an army of his subjects, Ionian and Aeolian Greeks among them, against this Amasis for the following reason.

He ends it (3.1.5) with:

τοῦτο δὴ τὸ ἔπος καὶ αὕτη ἡ αἰτία ἐγγενομένη ἤγαγε Καμβύσην τὸν Κύρου μεγάλως θυμωθέντα ἐπ’ Αἴγυπτον.

This speech and this crime that occurred turned Cyrus’ son Cambyses, furiously angry, against Amasis.

He only adds a little reservation by attributing the story to a particular source (οὕτω μὲν νυν λέγουσι Πέρσαι, ‘so the Persians say’).

He then gives the Egyptian version, of which he is much more critical: it was really Cyrus who asked for Amasis’ daughter in marriage, and Cambyses is the son of Apries’ daughter and Cyrus. He comments (3.2.2):

λέγοντες δὲ ταῦτα οὐκ ὀρθῶς λέγουσι· οὐ μὲν οὐδὲ λέληθε αὐτοὺς (εἰ γάρ τινες καὶ ἄλλοι, τὰ Περσέων νόμιμα [ὀρθῶς] ἐπιστάται καὶ Αἰγύπτιοι) ὅτι πρῶτα μὲν νόθον οὐ σφι νόμος ἐστὶ βασιλεῦσαι γνησίου παρεόντος, αὐτίς δὲ ὅτι Κασσανδάνης τῆς Φαρνάσπεω θυγατρὸς ἦν παῖς Καμβύσης, ἀνδρὸς Ἀχαμενίδεω, ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἐκ τῆς Αἰγυπτίης. ἀλλὰ παρατρέπουσι τὸν λόγον προσποιεῦμενοι τῇ Κύρου οἰκίῃ συγγενέες εἶναι. καὶ ταῦτα μὲν ὥδε ἔχει.

But what they say is false. They are certainly not unaware (for if any understand the customs of the Persians the Egyptians do) first, that it is not their custom for illegitimate offspring to rule when there are legitimate offspring; and secondly, that Cambyses was the son of Cassandane, the daughter of Pharnaspes, who was an Achaemenid, and not of the Egyptian woman. But they falsify the story, pretending to be related to the house of Cyrus. That is the truth of the matter.

There is also a third version, of which he does not specify the source: Cyrus has Nitetis as a concubine, and his lawful wife Cassandane expresses her jealousy to a Persian woman; her young son Cambyses then swears to take revenge on Egypt. Herodotus comments: ‘the following story, incredible to me, is also told’ (λέγεται δὲ καὶ ὁδε λόγος, ἐμοὶ μὲν οὐ πιθανός, 3.3.1).

Herodotus’ choices of what and what not to believe are quite puzzling to the reader, because Herodotus must know that Apries, the real father of the Egyptian bride, died some forty years before Cambyses became king. It is implausible, if not impossible, that Amasis would try to sell Cambyses a woman more than forty years old as a marriagable bride, and that her beauty and youth would be especially emphasised (3.1.3; Herodotus speaks of her as παῖς in 3.1.4). But the chronologically more plausible versions are rejected: the second version is very carefully proved wrong with reference to Persian custom and Cambyses’ pedigree; version three, however, is rather casually discarded (‘incredible to me’; ἐμοὶ μὲν οὐ πιθανός). This may be because Herodotus thinks that a concubine of Cambyses’ father Cyrus would have been too weak a motivation for Cambyses to invade Egypt and therefore decides in favour of the first version. However, we cannot know this for sure, as he does not explain why he believes something or does not—he very rarely does. This is exceptional in this story’s second version, which is carefully rejected

on comprehensible grounds, so that Herodotus' reasoning and logic, and therefore his reliability as a source, are strongly emphasised, as is the case in the examples cited above in the section, '(Apparent) Impartiality'.

In version two, Cambyses' motivation is his—debatable, but objectively possible—birthright to the Egyptian throne, while in version three, the campaign is motivated by very personal emotions of revenge, exactly as in version one, even if everything happens a generation earlier. It seems that the whole passage is supposed to convey two pieces of information: (1) Amasis was an intelligent and deceitful trickster, and (2) the Persian invasion of Egypt was motivated by the very personal objective of revenge. The story fits in well both with Herodotus' depiction of Amasis as a character²⁵ and the motivations for war he usually presents.²⁶

As concerns Herodotus' judgements of truth or untruth, they seem to be formed on other grounds—Persian customs, psychological plausibility—that have nothing to do with the point that the story is supposed to convey. This is important, I think, and it becomes unusually clear from the present case, where Herodotus, for once, explains his reservations, which he very rarely does. It is clear that he cares about the factuality or fictionality of a story, but it is also obvious that he finds the inclusion of fictional stories important for other reasons: as a valuable addition to a characterisation or a typical element in the process of historical events, or just to spice up a narrative.²⁷ In any case, the value of the story has nothing to do with its factuality or lack thereof. This is different in the cases discussed in the section, '(Apparent) Impartiality' (above), where false stories serve the interests of a party involved, and where the truth or untruth of a story is essential to the recipient's judgement regarding a conflict. Now we are advancing into terrain that is more complex for the modern reader of ancient historiography: the phenomenon of factual falseness in combination with 'another kind of truth'.

A complex example of conveying a truth that is not factual is the story of Xerxes' return to Persia by ship after the battle of Salamis (8.118).²⁸ Herodotus introduces it as a different story (ἄλλος λόγος) from his own version, in which Xerxes returned by land (8.118.1). The ship is endangered by a sea storm, and the captain tells the king that the fellow travellers constitute too heavy a load for the ship. Xerxes tells his people that now there is an opportunity 'to prove your concern for your king' (118.3)—they understand immediately and jump into the water, having prostrated themselves in front of the king. After arriving safely, Xerxes gives the captain a golden crown for

having saved him; then he has him beheaded for being the death of so many Persians (118.4).

The story fits Herodotus' condemnation of tyrannic licence²⁹ perfectly—but in the next chapter he insists it never happened. Nevertheless, the story serves as a perfect characterisation of the Persian king—even if it is factually untrue: Herodotus has chosen the story for its basic message, its likelihood and typicality, what the Greeks called *eikos*, not for its degree of factual truth.³⁰ The truth inherent is different from the factual truth—the example of a tyrannic act so typical of a megalomaniac king's 'ludicrously formalistic justice' is so compelling it just has to be told, even if it did not actually happen.³¹

Combining Versions: The Mosaic of Truth

Could there be more to the Xerxes story than just a spot-on characterisation? If we look at the way Herodotus discusses the truth or untruth of the different versions, it certainly seems so: he knows that the Persians returned home by land (8.115–17, 120), and after declaring the story about the sea voyage false ('I for my part believe neither the story of the Persians' fate nor any other part of it'—οὐδαμῶς ἔμοιγε πιστός, οὔτε ἄλλως οὔτε τὸ Περσέων τοῦτο πάθος, 8.119), he explains the first of his reasons:³² Xerxes' sacrifice of noble Persians seems ridiculous, because he could just as well have thrown out the Phoenician rowers. Thereby, Herodotus creates a theoretical third version in which the sea voyage actually happened but ends in a more plausible way.

It seems that in this case it is the plurality of versions that generates the complete message, because Herodotus' criticism regarding the credibility of the untrue version carries further implications: Xerxes' more 'plausible' sacrifice of the rowers instead of the Persian aristocrats, the 'third version', would not only be just as cruel, it would fit the rigorously hierarchical Persian monarchy even better.³³ Therefore, it is not just the untrue version that makes the perfect story; it is the untrue version plus Herodotus' reasoning why he does not believe it. Sometimes, it seems, the combination of a story, its false variant, and even the arguments why the latter is false, transports a message that a true story alone cannot.

This message can also consist of a narrative analogy of complex realities by a combination of various possibilities, as can be seen from my next example, the story of Croesus crossing the River Halys.³⁴

This, too, has to do with characterisation and therefore is not entirely separable from our version three, but the combination of versions seems to be more essential here than in the Xerxes story.

The tale of Croesus' river crossing is part of a larger motif in Herodotus: several of the Barbarian kings portrayed in the *Histories* desecrate rivers or even the sea, sometimes just by crossing it, sometimes by changing the natural environment. These actions that transgress national or even human boundaries are usually punished in the *Histories*, if not always immediately. There are many examples: King Cyrus feels insulted by the River Gyndes, where one of his sacred white horses has drowned (1.189–90; 5.52), and therefore parts it into tiny canals, taking its strength—simply to punish it and without any strategic reason, according to Herodotus.³⁵ When Cyrus later unnecessarily crosses the River Araxes because 'he thought himself to be something more than mortal' (τὸ δοκέειν πλεόν τι εἶναι ἀνθρώπου, 1.204.2), this leads to his downfall (1.205–8). Darius, too, forces his will upon nature by dominating not only a river, but the sea: during his Scythian campaign he bridges the Bosphorus. This change to nature is considerably graver than crossing a river, as it also means the linking of two continents, the separation of which is one of the central subjects of the *Histories*. And of course, Darius' Scythian campaign is doomed to fail.

The peak of this traditional desecrating of waters is reached by Xerxes, who tries to bridge the Hellespont (7.33–6) and fails, whereupon he scourges the sea and sinks fetters into it (7.35). Raging with anger, he has the Hellespont branded and verbally insulted and all the workers beheaded. The violation of nature turns into rebellion against divine order.³⁶

The case of Croesus is a foreshadowing of these later events,³⁷ if much more harmless—but it depends on which version of it we choose to believe. In the context of his attack on the Persians (1.75), Herodotus emphasises that Croesus had led his army over the River Halys using the bridges that were already there, 'as I maintain' (ὥς μὲν ἐγὼ λέγω). There is, however, an alternative story (1.75.3): Thales of Miletus had diverted the stream by digging a crescent from the river passing the rear of the camp and entering the original bed again, thus making the Halys in front of the army shallow, or even emptying it. 'But I do not believe this', says Herodotus (75.6: ἀλλὰ τοῦτο μὲν οὐ προσίεμαι), and the reader, having been informed that Croesus actually used existing bridges, must assume Herodotus does not believe anything about the Thales story. Surprisingly, though, his distrust only refers to the very last possibility: the complete drying up

of the river, which would have made Thales' trench in the back of the army as deep as the original river, and κῶς γὰρ ὁπίσω πορευόμενοι διέβησαν <ἄν> αὐτόν—'in that case, how did they pass the river when they were returning?' (75.6). This kind of reasoning seems absurd. Herodotus presents three versions, only one of which is true, as he states explicitly at the beginning. Then the other two are discussed and only one of them is rejected, although the other one is not compatible with the first, 'true' version, either.

Instead of brooding further on the logical problems of Herodotus' reasoning, it is worthwhile to inquire into the actual meaning of this 'original sin' of oriental river crossing. It has been noted by Munson and Flory that the untrue versions serve a better and more drastic illustration of Croesus' illegitimate violation of the natural boundary and therefore deserve to be told along with the factual truth.³⁸ There are three degrees of sacrilege in the different versions:

- 1 Croesus has crossed the river on existing bridges; his 'transgression' therefore consists of the crossing of a natural boundary, but not of its removal.
- 2 Croesus has had the river diverted, making it shallow and walkable. This exacerbates his sacrilege to the extent of Cyrus' diverting the Gyndes.
- 3 Croesus has entirely diverted the river, emptying the old river bed, and has thus committed the sacrilegious act of changing nature.

Versions two and three, true or not, mark the river crossing as an offence more clearly than version one.

The same may be the case in another story, a rather marginal anecdote about the Arab king who helps Cambyses conquer Egypt (1.9). In the version that Herodotus believes, the Arab uses camel skins to transport water to the desert; in 'the less plausible one' (τὸν ἥσσον πῖθανόν) he builds an aqueduct into the desert diverting a river, complete with tanks. The latter version would obviously be a change of nature and therefore more in tune with the sacrilegious mindset of the mad king Cambyses.³⁹

But the co-existence of versions in the narrative of Croesus' river crossing seems to result from other narrative strategies, too. Not only does the fictional story contain more truth than the factual version, but *together* they arrive at another level of truth. Herodotus may most incline towards the first version and least towards the third, but what

Croesus does is morally questionable in any case, and by the presentation of different versions, an unambiguous verdict is made impossible. Munson and Flory may be right in that the factually ‘wrong’ versions contain more of the truth Herodotus wants to tell, but neither version *replaces* the others—all are placed side by side.

This spectrum of possibilities looks like a model for the general characterisation of Croesus in the *Histories*. The Lydian king is portrayed in a very complex way, especially from a moral angle. Positive and negative actions alternate constantly, starting with his introduction as ‘the one who I myself know first did the Greeks unjust deeds’ (τὸν δὲ οἶδα αὐτὸς πρῶτον ὑπάρξαντα ἀδίκων ἔργων ἐς τοὺς Ἕλληνας, 1.5.3). Next, he is shown as the wise ruler who refrains from attacking the Ionian islanders because he listens to his adviser who tells him to respect the geographical facts, or what results from them: Greeks are good seafarers, whereas Lydians are better on land. In contrast, in the lengthy account of his meeting with Solon, the wise Athenian (1.30–33), Croesus is shown as completely unreasonable—Herodotus even interprets the death of Croesus’ son Atys as divine revenge, because the king believes himself to be the happiest of men (1.34.1). Later, Herodotus shows Croesus’ humility, when he tells poor Adrastus, who has involuntarily killed his son Atys, that Apollo was responsible for the deed (45.2). Immediately afterwards, however, Herodotus recounts the king’s dubious oracle test (46–9) proving his demanding attitude towards the divine, as do the immensely valuable and numerous dedications listed by Herodotus (50–52): they demonstrate Croesus’ piety, but also his status as a ‘good customer’, which he will insist on after his downfall. Croesus’ lack of attention towards the divine is also corroborated by his complacent misinterpretation of the infamous Delphic oracle saying ‘he would destroy a great empire’ (53.3), which he takes as a clear indication of victory, as if the god could not foretell anything negative to his ‘sponsor’. However, he does show some serious generosity towards the Delphians in the very next chapter (54), then again misinterprets another oracle (55–6) and does not listen to advice that might have saved him (71). After being captured by Cyrus, Croesus realises he should have listened to the wise Solon, and Apollo saves his life by sending rain to put out the pyre (86–7). He is therefore perceived by Cyrus as ‘dear to god and a good man’ (87.2) and becomes the Persian king’s own wise adviser (88–9)—only ever failing in his very last, fatal suggestion: ironically, he advises Cyrus to cross the river, in this case the Araxes (206–7).

A key scene is Croesus’ complaint to the Delphic priests, reproaching the ‘ungrateful’ god for having been deceived despite his

generosity and reverence for oracles (90.2–4). The obvious impertinence goes unpunished; Apollo's answer even proves that Croesus is loved by the gods: the king has to atone for the sin of his ancestor Gyges, but Apollo has personally secured him three additional years. As for the oracles, he tells the king their true meanings, and finally, Croesus humbly accepts his own responsibility (91.6).

Croesus is portrayed as a character permanently wavering between good and bad, piety and *hybris*, whose very nature is ambivalence. Consequently, the manner of narrating his encounter with the River Halys seems like a metaphor for his general character: it is clear he has overstepped boundaries, yet not only are we ignorant of the extent, but Herodotus presents us with clearly incompatible versions, which illustrate the contradictions in Croesus' character.

The example of Croesus crossing the Halys illustrates how meaning can be generated 'at the expense' of a modern concept of logic: although the story has explicitly been labelled 'untrue' as a whole, one variant of it is nevertheless discussed at length, producing a panorama of simultaneous possibilities extant in Croesus' character. Incompatible versions side by side do seem to have narrative effects. So in addition to Herodotus' presentation of untrue stories because of their inherent value, be it *poikilia* or non-factual truth, there may also be the possibility that all versions have to be read together to constitute the truth that Herodotus wishes to convey.⁴⁰

My last examples are the so-called 'rape stories' that stand programatically at the beginning of the *Histories* (1.1–5).⁴¹ At first, Herodotus tells us a version that he attributes to the Persians: Phoenician merchants have come to the coast of Argos. When Princess Io wants to take a look at their goods, they throw her into the ship and sail away. Later, Greeks come to Phoenicia and abduct Europa. This should make things even, but then the Greeks take Medea from Colchis, and when the king wants his daughter back, they tell him that they have never received compensation for Io, and therefore will not give back Medeia or any money. This spiral of revenge is continued when the Trojan Alexandros/Paris abducts Helen from Greece, ending in the Trojan War.

This is how the Persians report the genesis of the enmities between Asians and Europeans, says Herodotus. The Phoenicians tell a different story: they did not take Io with them using force; the girl, they say, had already slept with the captain of the ship in Argos and fled her homeland when realising she was pregnant.

Modern scholarship on Herodotus' unusual introduction has often concentrated on his statement that he does not want to decide between versions but rather report things he is able to 'know' (1.5.3). This sounds programmatic, and the 'rape stories' themselves have been interpreted in this way: as an announcement of new rationalism,⁴² as a parody on traditional reports,⁴³ or as a geographical outline of the *oikoumene*.⁴⁴ Besides this, the stories allow us more insight into Herodotus' technique of assembling incompatible versions.

Together—and only together—the stories about Io show an uncanny resemblance to the *Odyssey*'s tale of Eumaios' nurse (15.415–75). It goes as follows. When Phoenician merchants land on the island of Syria, where Eumaios' father is king, one of them seduces little Eumaios' nurse. She tells her lover that she is originally a Phoenician of rich origin, but has been robbed and sold as a slave to Eumaios' father. They plan to elope, and the nurse has the merchant go to the palace, where he distracts all the women with his trinkets, so the nurse can run away, robbing Eumaios' father not only of several treasures, but also of his son, who will later be sold as a slave to Laërtes, king of Ithaca.

The Homeric story shares the following elements with the two versions of Herodotus:

- 1 A Phoenician ship lands in Greece.
- 2 The offered goods are of special interest to women.⁴⁵
- 3 One of the customers is a rich and noble woman, or a woman of noble origin.⁴⁶
- 4a She is raped and abducted by the Phoenicians, or
- 4b she has an affair with one of the Phoenicians and elopes with them.
- 5 She takes a child with her (Io has the yet unborn child of the captain with her, whereas the Homeric nurse takes little Eumaios).

The Homeric parallel does not fit one of the two versions but only the combination of the two, the Persian variant containing elements 1–4a and the Phoenician supplying 4b and 5 (while implicitly containing 1–3 as well). The *Odyssey* has both 4a and 4b: the nurse is originally Phoenician; she has been abducted and taken to Greece (4a) and only

later runs off with the Phoenicians (4b). This parallel, therefore, is structural: both the *Odyssey* and the *Histories* contain some kind of doubling: Homer tells a rape story that is repeated,⁴⁷ Herodotus two versions of one tale.

The recipient of the *Histories* merges the versions and associates the *Odyssey*. By adapting the rape story to the Homeric tale, it is elevated to the level of Homeric epic, thereby becoming part of an omnipresent mythical and literary canon. By connecting the story with this overarching model, tradition is perfected, myth made more mythical: whatever the Persians and Phoenicians say, even when contradicting each other, the result will inevitably be the same—eternal story. This impression is confirmed by the element of doubling. Homer's story, too, is a reprise, as Eumaios' nurse has been abducted before. Repetition is a fundamental component of the narrative.

Seeing that the Homeric allusion only works when the factually incompatible versions are synthesised, the story appears self-generated, thereby again depicting the constant cycle that is history. The Herodotean *kyklos* does not just consist in the rise and fall of an individual, but also in the schematic redundancy of historical events. It is depicted in the rape stories in a quasi-poetological manner.

Fictional Historiography and Its Poetic Tradition⁴⁸

Herodotus seems genuinely interested in marking a story as true—in a very modern sense of factuality—or false. What is different from the way a modern historiographer would choose his material, is the value that Herodotus sees even in false stories, or in the combination of false stories with true variants.⁴⁹ From a modern perspective, we tend to define historiographical truth as *factuality*. Its opposite, un-truth, things that did not happen, are motivated by lying or misinformation—or by the category of fiction. In antiquity, truth is not always factuality; indeed, it is very hard to define, *aletheia* being 'that which has not been forgotten' as opposed to *lethe*⁵⁰—because of its *social relevance*, which implies a more than factual truth inherent. Wolfgang Rösler has demonstrated that a claim of truthfulness, albeit unspecific, applies to all texts of the oral or at least, initially oral, Greek culture, citing among other texts the literary criticism of the pre-Socratics, who distinguish separate genres exclusively by formal differences.⁵¹ The degree of fictionality does not figure as a criterion. Homeric epic, for its part, is a historical source taken very seriously by ancient

historians, among them Herodotus (cf. 2.113–20), who generally regards poetical texts as reliable references⁵²—always with healthy scepticism,⁵³ but that makes it especially clear that he considers poetic tradition an important source that has to be carefully taken into account. Also, the *Histories* are heavily influenced by the characteristics of oral literature, first, because they are a collection of orally transmitted stories, and secondly, because there is not much non-oral narrative around yet.⁵⁴ So it is not surprising that Herodotus' narrative is heavily influenced by Homeric epic.

The *Histories* are not fiction, not in the sense of a 'willing suspension of disbelief', for there is usually a version that Herodotus considers factually true, and it is important for him to mark the factual truth as such. For want of a better expression, I would like to call the factual versions the main 'plot' of his histories, and consider the untrue yet important other versions a type of factually incompatible, but interpretatively necessary digression from it.

This kind of incompatibility of narrative elements with the main 'plot' seems clearly derived from mythical storytelling: all ancient authors have to deal with different versions of stories they can choose from or combine—a famous example is the myth of Helen with its mutually exclusive variants of the heroine being in Troy or Egypt. It is Herodotus who attributes the combination of *both* variants to Homer (2.116).⁵⁵ And indeed the combination of incompatible versions can be traced back to Homeric epic. James V. Morrison collects Homer's possibilities of playing at various plots at the same time, such as simultaneously telling two types of tale, for example in the aftermath of Odysseus' shipwreck in Phaeacia.⁵⁶ Uvo Hölscher had already shown that incompatible narratives intertwine here: the fairy-tale wedding of the hero and the king's daughter versus the return of the hero to his wife; Morrison calls it a communication in different systems of plot—'female benefactor aids hero's return' on the one hand, Odysseus' perspective, that is, and 'hero wins the king's daughter' on the other hand, which Nausicaa hopes for.⁵⁷ By continuously insinuating an alternative scenario—Odysseus' wedding to Nausicaa—the narrative creates suspense.⁵⁸

Obviously, the completion of 'what happened' by 'what could also have happened' is not something Herodotus invented. The difference is that Herodotus usually gives additional information with his versions—their origin or degree of truth—while Homer has his plot types intertwine without comment.⁵⁹

The result of the incompatible plot types in the *Odyssey* as cited by

Hölscher and Morrison seems to be an increase of suspense—this is not always the case with Herodotus’ untrue versions, although something like suspense is created by the untrue stories that are reported for their *poikilia*. Other untrue stories in Herodotus add another semantic level, another way of interpretation, to the factually true variant. There is an example in the *Iliad* that gives the impression this aspect of Herodotean storytelling might be rooted in an epic tradition, too.

The first seven books of the *Iliad* present several events that seem incompatible with the general ‘plot’. After Thetis’ appeal to Zeus in the first book, we expect an immediate continuation of that storyline: the father of the gods will honour Achilles and strengthen the Trojans. This does in fact happen, but only in the eighth book. In the meantime, books two to seven interrupt the hitherto-linear narrative. Of course, this retardation also results in an increase of suspense,⁶⁰ but there is more to it: there are several events that do not logically fit in and are incompatible with the mythical plot.⁶¹ Most remarkable in that respect are the *teichoskopia* (3.121–244), where Helen presents the Greek heroes to King Priam, who, after ten years of war, acts as if he has never seen any of them before, and, also in the third book, the duel between Paris and Menelaus, that logically belongs at the beginning of the war (just as Antenor’s suggestion to give Helen back at 7.357–64).

The *Iliad*’s anachronistic passages and Herodotus’ untrue versions have in common that they do not fit into the current plot of the narrative—but they are needed to provide the audience with a kind of background to it. While the Herodotean alternative versions seem to transport a kind of ‘philosophical’ or ‘interpretative’ truth, the anachronisms in the *Iliad* convey information about the current plot’s previous history. The recipient needs to be reminded of the Greek protagonists, even if Priam does not, and the obvious question why the argument over Helen is not settled by the two protagonists must be got out of the way, even if a duel between Menelaus and Paris is highly unlikely in the tenth year of war.

Herodotus’ continuation of narrative traditions with which his contemporaries were still familiar cannot have seemed unusual to a contemporary audience. Accordingly, criticism about Herodotus’ way of writing history is usually either much later, or it deals with something other than his inclusion of fictional stories. The category of *fiction* is not very clear in antiquity anyway. There are a few exceptions, where the category of fiction seems actually to come into play, for example the famous claim of Gorgias that with the ἀπάτη,

the ‘deceit’, of tragedy ‘the deceiver [is] juster than the non-deceiver, and the deceived wiser than the non-deceived’ (B 23 D–K). There is also Aristotle’s famous differentiation between poetry and historiography, the latter reporting ‘what happened’ (τὰ γενόμενα), the former, ‘what might happen’ (οἷα ἂν γένοιτο, 1451b4–5).⁶² Later, Cicero claims that mythical and poetical traditions have no place in historiography, which should be orientated only at truth (*Leg.* 1.1.5); this is followed by the famous reservation that, ‘in Herodotus, the father of history, and in Theopompus there are countless stories (*fabulae*)’.⁶³ Others are not as clear, not even Thucydides with his remark about his predecessors aiming at aesthetical pleasure rather than truth (ἐπὶ τὸ προσαγωγότερον τῇ ἀκροάσει ἢ ἀληθέστερον) and ‘reaching the field of myth’ (ἐπὶ τὸ μυθῶδες ἐκνευικηκότα, 1.21). However, it is unclear what Thucydides means by ‘myth’. It does not seem the opposite of *factual* truth: he himself includes King Minos and the Trojan War in his work. Also, it has been clear at least since Francis Cornford’s *Thucydides Mythistoricus* (1907) that the work of Herodotus’ successor is shaped by traditional patterns and tragic influence, too.

The claim that historiography should be fact, not fiction, is contested by Quintilian, who in *Inst.* 10.1.31 calls history *proxima poetis* and *carmen solutum*—historiography is prose poetry.⁶⁴ It has no purpose but *memoria posteritatis*—and the glory of the auctorial genius. Although in the case of Herodotus, this verdict seems more insightful than Aristotle’s, we still do not receive a clear definition of what truth and fiction really are—for Quintilian does not tell us if he regards poetry as purely fictional, and it is very unlikely that he would approve of a kind of historiography that does not contain any factual details at all.

Much later, even Herodotus’ harshest critic Plutarch does not deplore the actual lack of factuality in his polemical rant against his predecessor, *On the Malice of Herodotus* (*Mor.* 854e–874c), but Herodotus’ κακοήθεια, the lack of moral integrity, of δικαιοσύνη: Herodotus’ reports are falsified by prejudice and favouritism,⁶⁵ and this leads to lies and fiction. Plutarch’s censure is all about Herodotus’ partiality. There is no call for factuality *per se*, which becomes clear when Plutarch reproaches Herodotus for *suppressing* a positive story about the Lesbian tyrant Pittacus—a story that is clearly legendary: Pittacus throws a spear in order to measure a piece of land assigned to him, a fateful way of determining geographical spaces that has several parallels in Greek narrative tradition⁶⁶ and whose historicity is very dubious indeed.

To sum up, modern thought usually sees truth as factuality and divides its opposites according to motive—fiction, misinformation, lying. In antiquity, while the idea of deliberate lying exists, too, and so does, undoubtedly, misinformation, The concept of fiction is hazy, and the opposite of all this ‘un-truth’ is not necessarily factual truth.

Many Shades of Truth

Herodotus does not write fiction. But placing him into a narrative tradition that we would regard as fictional, such as Homeric epic, may help the modern reader to deal with the non-factual elements in his narrative—and their important function regarding the *Histories*’ factual ‘plot’. The incompatibility of truth and untruth, the modern separation of spheres, does not seem to pose a problem to Herodotus: he is ‘comfortable with the fragmented diversity of the world’, as Rosaria Munson writes (2001, 272); and that holds, too, for the disparate and often incompatible parts of ‘truth’ that may be false on their own, but in combination form a spectrum of truth that could not be achieved without them.

To come back to Lucian’s *True Story*, he assures his readers in his programmatic beginning that absolutely everything in his narrative is going to be a lie:

κἀν ἔν γάρ δὴ τοῦτο ἀληθεύσω λέγων ὅτι ψεύδομαι. οὕτω δ’ ἂν μοι δοκῶ καὶ τὴν παρὰ τῶν ἄλλων κατηγορίαν ἐκφυγεῖν αὐτὸς ὁμολογῶν μηδὲν ἀληθὲς λέγειν. γράφω τοίνυν περὶ ὧν μήτε εἶδον μήτε ἔπαθον μήτε παρ’ ἄλλων ἐπυθόμην, ἔτι δὲ μήτε ὅλως ὄντων μήτε τὴν ἀρχὴν γενέσθαι δυναμένων. διὸ δεῖ τοὺς ἐντυγχάνοντας μηδαμῶς πιστεῦειν αὐτοῖς.

Though I tell the truth in nothing else, I shall at least be truthful in saying that I am a liar. I think I can escape the censure of the world by my own admission that I am not telling a word of truth. Be it understood, then, that I am writing about things which I have neither seen nor had to do with nor learned from others—which, in fact, do not exist at all and, in the nature of things, cannot exist. Therefore my readers should on no account believe in them.

Lucian, *VH* 1.4

However, there are plenty of truth claims in the text where the narrator emphatically stresses the veracity of his report.⁶⁷ The most striking is the passage cited at the beginning of this paper: ‘I have never told a lie that I know of’ (2.31: οὐδὲν γὰρ ἐμαυτῷ ψεῦδος εἰπόντι συνηπιστάμην). In strict logic, this is a double negation, if combined with the proem’s claim that nothing in the narrative is true: if everything is a lie, then this is, too, so the narrator has told a lot of

lies and knows so very well. In this programmatic passage, this is surely the way to read it. But what about the other passages? How does emphasising the veracity of a single report make sense if the whole text is marked as a lie? Does it make the passage more mendacious than the rest of the text? Does ‘this is really true’ after the claim of the proem mean ‘now, this *really* is a lie’? If so, what about the rest of the narrative? Less of a lie?

Of course, Lucian’s truth claims are parodic insertions making fun of historiographers like Herodotus. But they can also explain something about Herodotus’ judgements that they are modelled after—they do not follow our modern logic of the dichotomy between true and false, an exclusive separation that makes it impossible for something to be false and improbable at the same time, much less false and true. It seems that Herodotus is serious about his judgements—but some stories are truer or falsier than others, and even false versions can contain, or contribute to, the truth.

Notes

- 1 All translations of Lucian in this paper are by A. M. Harmon, sometimes slightly altered. Many thanks to Magdalene Stoevesandt and Stephanie West for giving me their very helpful thoughts on this paper.
- 2 Cf. Strabo (1.2.35) and Diodorus (1.69.7), who accuse prose writers, among them Herodotus, of *deliberately* weaving in ‘myths’ to seduce their readers; Flavius Josephus even goes so far as to say Herodotus is considered a liar by ‘everybody’ (Ap. 1.15–18).
- 3 Cf. Lateiner (1989, 76–90) with a discussion of Herodotus’ method and a list of all instances where he presents different versions of one story.
- 4 E.g. his belief in the Delphian claim that one of the mixing bowls donated by Croesus is the work of Theodorus of Samos (1.51.3), or his disbelief in a detail of the Battus legend as told by Therans and Cyreneans (Battus is Libyan for ‘king’, so the hero was given the name as a title, not when he was born, 4.155.1–2).
- 5 Cf. e.g. 1.75.6, 1.182.1, 2.121.ε.1, 2.131.3, 3.2–3, 3.16.7, 3.56.2, 3.116.2, 4.5.1, 4.25.1, 4.42.4, 4.77.2, 5.86.3, 6.121.1, 7.152.1, 8.119.1, 8.120.
- 6 Cf. Lateiner (1989, 79), for similar statements.
- 7 Cf. e.g. the poetic sources of Croesus’ fate at the sack of Sardis (1.86–7) famously discussed by Burkert (1985) (and, independently, W.-H. Friedrich in a paper published posthumously in 1998, where he also deals with the poetic sources of the passages on Helen and Gyges). For the historiographic contents of non-historiographic genres see e.g. Bowie (2001) on early Greek elegiac and iambic poetry.
- 8 How and Wells (1912, 36).
- 9 Cf. e.g. Nesselrath (1995) for Herodotus’ careful examination of his sources even with stories that seem completely unbelievable at first sight, like the gold-digging ants of northern India.

- 10 In this case, we actually have a Greek source beside Herodotus: Hellanicus 4 F 73 *FGrH*, who tells the same story, perhaps independently (Fowler 2013, 2.683).
- 11 Cf. Hartog (1978, 38).
- 12 It is certainly exaggerated to interpret Herodotus' note of the chronological problem as Corcella does (in Asheri et al. 2007) ad loc.: as polemics against the Greek version, insinuating that it is much more likely that Pythagoras had been influenced by Zalmoxis than *vice versa*. Cf. Macan (1895), ad loc.: 'there is indeed irony in this passage, but it is unconscious, the self-exposure of those Greeks whose mouthpiece for the moment is Hdt., though he himself does not credit the tale, and charges them with an anachronism'. In any case, Herodotus is careful with the material: Zalmoxis is one of only three foreign divinities whom he does not identify with a Greek god (the others are Kybebe in 5.102.1 and Pleistoros in 9.119.1).
- 13 See Hornblower (2007) for a detailed analysis of the entire Dorieus episode (42–8) and its ties with the greater context of the Ionian Revolt.
- 14 This is the only hint of an argument that Herodotus himself provides; the assumption that he must side with the Sybarites because Sybaris is the mother town of his own possible 'hometown' Thurii (Macan, 1895, ad loc.; cf. Hornblower, 2013, ad loc.) is pure speculation.
- 15 Herodotus includes two different ideas in this passage: that people find their own troubles less distressing when they compare them with those of their neighbours (ἐγκύψαντες ἄν ἐς τὰ τῶν πέλας κακὰ ἀσπασίως ἕκαστοι αὐτῶν ἀποφεροῖατο ὁπίσω τὰ ἐσθνεῖκαντο), and that people's vices are usually not worse than those of their neighbours (οὕτω [δὴ] οὐδ' Ἀργεῖοι αἰσχίστα πεποίηται); cf. Macan (1895, ad loc.).
- 16 Cf. Flory (1987, 62–7); Goldhill (2002, 28). Claims of truth and discussion of sources are also an anthropological constant of narration, as seen in the *Odyssey* 12.389–90, when Odysseus assures the Phaeacians that he got his information about a conversation between Zeus and Helios from Calypso (Strasburger 1972, 21–5).
- 17 This story may be attested outside Herodotus' text: the depictions on a gold vessel from the Kul'-Oba burial mound in the eastern Crimea are very suggestive of it (a man with a bow-and-arrow case speaks with two bearded men, then passes the bow on to a beardless youth); the same subject may be depicted on another fourth-century vessel from a tomb near Voronezh. For the discussion about whether this is an illustration of the myth told by Herodotus, cf. Meyer (2013, 13, 27–8).
- 18 For the folktale elements of the other two versions see Corcella (in Asheri, Lloyd and Corcella 2007) on 5–7 and 8–10, with bibliography.
- 19 He ends the passage with the verdict that 'Aristeas' story does not agree with the Scythian account about this country' (4.13.2: οὐδὲ οὗτος συμφέρεται περὶ τῆς χώρας ταύτης Σκύθησι), probably meaning the version told directly before that is believed by 'Greeks and barbarians' (that is, by Scythians as well?), and the slight differences about who pushed the Scythians out of their land and whether the Cimmerians left before the Scythians arrived or were driven out. Herodotus cannot mean by 'Scythian account' the myth he reported in 4.5–7, because it is not only Aristeas' version that differs from this, but also all other versions mentioned.
- 20 See Flory (1987, 71–2).
- 21 Cf. Bianchi (1981) with a diachronical overview. *Kynokephaloi* and

Sternophthalmoi are also mentioned by Aeschylus (fr. 431, 441).

- 22 Corcella (in Asheri et al. 2013) ad loc.
- 23 Other stories that for a modern reader belong to the exact same register of *poikilia* are not labelled as lies by Herodotus and may well have been believed by him (Nesselrath 1995).
- 24 For the proximity of the Nitetis story to the folktale motif of the ‘rape story’ see Lang (1972).
- 25 Amasis, the wise friend of Polycrates of Samos (3.39–43) comes to power by a coup against his former master Apries (2.162–3, 169) and wins the Egyptians over with his wise and not unreasonable ways (2.172.2: μετὰ δὲ σοφίῃ . . . οὐκ ἀγνωμοσύνη) using a fitting metaphor of a golden wash bowl turned into a god’s image for himself, the commoner who had become king; he is a thief with great respect for the oracles that have exposed him as such (2.174). Cf. also 3.16, where Herodotus uses another story that he believes untrue to characterise the cunning Amasis: the pharaoh orders that his body posthumously be exchanged in the grave so as not to be defiled by Cambyses; however, Herodotus does not believe this—‘I think that these commands of Amasis, regarding the burialplace and the man, were never given at all, and that the Egyptians believe in them in vain’ (3.16.7: αἱ μὲν νυν ἐκ τοῦ Ἀμᾶσιος ἐντολαὶ αὐταὶ αἱ ἐς τὴν ταφὴν τε καὶ τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἔχουσαι οὐ μοι δοκεῖσιν ἀρχὴν γενέσθαι, ἄλλως δ’ αὐτὰ Αἰγύπτιοι σεμνοῦν). Exactly the same is the case with Polycrates, another notoriously devious character (cf. his rise to power in 3.39: he ousts his brothers and sophistically wisecracks about making friends by stealing and giving back), about whom Herodotus cites ‘a foolish tale’, ματαίωτος λόγος (3.56.2), of how he got rid of the Lacedaemonians besieging Samos (bribing them with counterfeit money).
- 26 Going to war in the *Histories* is often a personal matter, cf. e.g. Oroites’ possible motivations of attacking Samos (3.120–21) or Darius’ being persuaded to invade Greece by Atossa, who owes a favour to a Greek physician (3.133–4); note that, in the present story, the idea of asking Amasis for his daughter is also suggested by a physician, this time an Egyptian who hates Amasis because he has sent him to the Persian court (3.1.1–2).
- 27 Cf. Flory (1987, 57): ‘Herodotus . . . attempts . . . to bridge the gap between the historian’s task, which according to Aristotle is to present what really happened, and the task of the poet, which Aristotle says is to present the possibilities of what might have happened (*Poetics* 1451b)’.
- 28 Cf. Wesselmann (2011, 308–10).
- 29 There can be no doubt that Herodotus has severe reservations about monarchy, cf. e.g. 5.78, where he connects Athens’ new power and success in the Persian Wars with the new form of democracy, or the conversation of Xerxes and Demaratus about the free Lacedaemonians that are only subject to *nomos*, in contrast to the Persian subjects of the king (7.104.4), or the connection of monarchy and *hybris* presented by Otanes in the constitutional debate (3.80). Cf. Wesselmann (2011, 144–5 n. 362), with a survey of literature on the subject.
- 30 Cf. Flory (1987, 56–69).
- 31 Munson (1986, 97). Compare Herodotus’ presentation of the two different motivations that may have led the Persian governor of Sardis Oroites to attack Polycrates of Samos (3.120–21). In this case, no version is rejected; Herodotus just says that the latter has fewer supporters. But it seems to be even more important than the first. Both motivations are very personal—(1) Oroites is told by a colleague that Polycrates has conquered Samos with only 15 hoplites and if

Oroites does not add it to his province; he is not a real man; (2) Oroites sends a messenger to Polycrates who is, for some reason, ignored by the ruler of Samos, so Oroites gets angry—and both are designed to show the arbitrariness of Oroites' decision making.

- 32 The second reason, proof that Xerxes went home via Abdera, is mentioned in 8.120.
- 33 Cf. the Persian sacrifices of soldiers that Herodotus critically comments on (Cyrus: 1.207.6–7, 1.211; Darius: 3.154–60, 4.134–6).
- 34 Cf. Wesselmann (2011, 55–78).
- 35 Cf. Fisher (1992, 352–7): '[Herodotus] presents the act as pointlessly vindictive, wasting time, and insulting the river' (354)—in contrast to the diversion of the Euphrates 1.191, which 'was at least an effective stratagem that led to the capture of the city. That itself is presented as fairly naked Persian aggression (cf. 1.190.2), and the stratagem perhaps fits the aggressive intent; but it seems hard to view it in itself as a particularly hybriatic or gratuitous outrage.' However, even the latter action has been considered *hybris* (Immerwahr 1966, 166). Munson (2001, 11f.) points out that Cyrus' punishment of the Gyndes has no negative consequences for him; neither has his drainage of the Euphrates (1.191). She still finds the control of Nature 'morally problematic and therefore dangerous These acts also represent . . . monarchic imperialism over the environment.'
- 36 That the two continents cannot be made into one, and that this is a central motif in Herodotus' work, has often been noted, cf. e.g. Pohlenz (1937, 116); Huber (1965, 44); Immerwahr (1966, 306, 316); Lateiner (1985, 88f).
- 37 Corcella (in Asheri et al. 2007) on 75.3 and 4.
- 38 Munson (1986, 97); Flory (1987, 55–69).
- 39 Cambyses is constantly violating both a 'sociocultural' and a 'theological code' (Munson 1991, 46f.), as Herodotus states, e.g. 3.38.1: 'I hold it then in every way proved that Cambyses was quite insane; or he would never have set himself to deride religion and custom' (πανταχῇ ὧν μοι δῆλόν ἐστι ὅτι ἐμάνη μεγάλως ὁ Καμβύσης· οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἱεροῖσι τε καὶ νομαίοισι ἐπεχείρησε καταγελᾶν). Among other things, the sacrilegious acts of the mad king consist in the desecration of Egyptian sanctuaries (3.16; 25.3; 37); the utmost profanation is his fatal wounding of the Apis bull (3.27–9).
- 40 This may also be the case in the above-mentioned discussion of Zalmoxis' status as either a god or a human—the versions may in combination express his 'otherness' and indefinability to Herodotus and his Greek readers (Hartog 1978).
- 41 Cf. Wesselmann (2011, 310–13).
- 42 Rose (1940, 79); cf. Asheri (in Asheri et al. 2007) on 1.1–5.
- 43 Flory (1987, 23–48); Goldhill (2002, 13–15).
- 44 Dewald (2006, 146–7).
- 45 *Od.* 15.416: 'bringing countless trinkets' (μυρὶ ἄγοντες ἀθύρματα), *Hdt.* 1.1.4: 'the wares they most liked' τῶν φορτίων τῶν σοῖ [the women] ἧν θυμὸς μάλιστα.
- 46 Io is King Inachus' daughter; the Homeric nurse's parents are rich (15.432: ἀφνειοί) and live in a large mansion (ὑπερεφές δῶ, 433).
- 47 She is taken away twice (and she repeats the rape herself by abducting Eumaios).

- 48 For the following see Wesselmann (2011, 313–35).
- 49 If a modern historian chose to include untrue versions, he would explicitly state why: because they were rumours current at the time that give a picture of the contemporary mentality (such as medieval rumours about Jews poisoning wells) or because one of the untrue versions was very influential and led to an actual historical development (such as Marie Antoinette's necklace affair, which gravely damaged her public image). But these stories would not be included without proper contextualisation.
- 50 For the controversial discussion about the use of the term ἀληθές (especially for the approaches of Heidegger 1927 and Snell 1975) and for the other Greek terms for 'truth' see Cole (1983).
- 51 Rösler (1980, 286–9).
- 52 Cf. 2.156.6; 4.29; 6.52.1.
- 53 Some traditions are considered poetical invention, e.g. 2.23, or are openly rejected, e.g. Helen's stay in Troy 2.113–20, cf. Boedeker (2000, 103–4): 'at times Herodotus applies to other texts (such as Homeric epic) the same standards of plausibility that he implicitly claims for himself'.
- 54 Cf. e.g. Stahl (1987, esp. 19–53), and more recently the articles assembled by Giangiulio (2005); also Wesselmann (2011, 322–4).
- 55 See, respectively, Wright and Ellis, this volume.
- 56 Morrison (2000).
- 57 Rösler (1980, 166–7); Morrison (2000: 69).
- 58 A similar phenomenon, but one that is completely in accord with modern expectations of factuality, is the 'if-not-situation', counterfactual passages, where the narrator contemplates alternatives to the effective outcome. These passages can be found in Herodotus, from simple conjectures (e.g. 3.15.2: Psammenitus would have made governor over Egypt had he not meddled in state affairs) to the dramatic picture of what would have happened to Greece had the Athenians medised (7.139.1–4); see Lateiner (1989, 81–2). Although this method is by no means contrary to a modern understanding of historiography (cf. Lateiner 1989, 82: 'here he is not reporter, mouthpiece, dupe, or chronicler, but an analyst considering military strategy, national morale, political expediency, and historical alternatives'), it is also prefigured in epic narrative: the Homeric epic uses the device of the if-not-situation fairly often (cf. e.g. Nesselrath 1992); it creates suspense despite the recipient's knowledge of the outcome, such as at *Il.* 2.155–6 (after Agamemnon's deceitful speech, the Achaeans would have sailed home and the war would have been over, had Hera and Athena not intervened)—cf. Brügger et al. (2003), ad loc. with further bibliography.
- 59 It is not surprising that the situation of shipwreck becomes emblematic for the multiplicity of possibilities, the decision on a knife edge, as Morrison demonstrates from several modern examples: 'the sea's lack of predictability promotes the contemplation of multiple resolutions' (2000, 86, and generally 71–86). Herodotus' story of Xerxes and the captain—one of two possible versions with the captain getting rewarded and punished for acting rightly or wrongly—seems to follow the same tradition.
- 60 Cf. Morrison (1992, 35–43) for books two to four.
- 61 For the following cf. Bethe (1914, 63–7); R. Friedrich (1975, 104 and n. 12); Latacz (1985 [2003], 159–66; 2000, 154–5); Stoevesandt (2008, 11).
- 62 See also Ellis and Ruffell, this volume.

- 63 Cf. also de Or. 2.62: *nam quis nescit primam esse historiae legem, ne quid falsi dicere audeat? Deinde ne quid veri non audeat? Ne quae suspicio gratiae sit in scribendo? Ne quae simultatis?* ('Because who does not know that it is the first law of history that it should not dare to say anything false? Second, that it should not lack the courage to say anything true? That there should be no suspicion of partiality in writing? none of hostility?')
- 64 Cf. Strabo 11.6.3, who polemically compares historiographers with poets.
- 65 Cf. Baragwanath (2008, 9–22).
- 66 Cf. Hdt. 4.7.2; Verg. *A.* 1.367f., Ov. *Met.* 3.10–27 et al.
- 67 E.g. 1.13; 1.18; 1.25; 1.26; 1.40.

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8 Intertextuality and Plural Truths in Xenophon's Historical Narrative

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Historians like other ancient authors commonly bolstered their own authority through polemic against and references to authoritative forerunners. The construction of one's historiographical persona and pedigree involved a constant negotiation between evoking tradition, and displaying the distinctive qualities of one's own work and the special claim to memory of one's subject matter.¹ The historians' negotiations with predecessors could be subtle—far subtler than the clumsy efforts to imitate Herodotus, Thucydides and Xenophon that Lucian humorously decries in his *How to Write History*. At the same time, allusions to predecessors could contribute to an author's own historical interpretation: such references could swiftly summon up the stretch of history described in the earlier work, without the need for belaboured explicit comparison. They could serve as shorthand for an entire world: the world of Homer's Troy, the world of Herodotus' Persian Wars, the world of Thucydides' Peloponnesian War. This is the sense in which intertextuality may generate truths, and indeed complex and plural truths, which rely upon readers' broader literary *imaginaire*. My paper is concerned then with one more way of 'getting at the truth', or one more *mode de connaissance du réel*.² The implicit mode of intertextuality presents a contrast to explicit claims about *aletheia*, accuracy, and so forth, which Xenophon in *Hellenica* eschews. It complements other implicit modes of getting at truth in historical texts: for example, the use of mythic symbolism³ or counterfactual analysis (or 'sideshadowing').⁴ The sort of truth it helps convey may be more philosophical and symbolic than factual.

Intertextuality, interpretation, plural truths

Let us begin with some general observations on intertextuality, interpretation and truth in relation to historiographical texts. A key question (to borrow from the title of a recent article by Cynthia Damon) is that of 'déjà vu ou déjà lu?' In dealing with historical texts

it may be difficult to determine whether a later author is referring to the historical event itself, or to its representation in historiography: to the Peloponnesian War *tout court*, or to *Thucydides'* Peloponnesian War, to Melos, or to *Thucydides'* Melos.⁵ The distinction is an important one: for Thucydides' narrative and interpretation evokes one sort of world, certain ways in which things happen, explanatory hierarchies; Herodotus', others. The historical events themselves are not emplotted in this way.⁶ In a Herodotean world and narrative, for example, we expect the divine to play a distinct role; personal motivation to be key; women to affect historical outcomes in a way in which they do not in Thucydides; and so on and so forth. A reference to Herodotus' *Histories* can thus bring in its train a wider reference to a particular model of reality and interpretation.

Allusions in a historical text to a previous work on a previous war may not be merely a literary phenomenon: they may suggest ways in which memories of a particular past war (or its literary representation) affected ideas and conduct at the time of a later war. Thus Tim Rood has made the case that Thucydides' Herodotean intertextuality suggests that people at the time experienced the Peloponnesian War in terms of Herodotus' Persian Wars as a *perversion* of the unity of that war.⁷ The comparison issues in a historical interpretation: a judgement of the difference of this war from that, of how the present represents a change from the past, a deterioration in this case from the past; but at the same time it can raise awareness that not all has changed over time, that the story may be one of development rather than stark difference. Herodotus, indeed, had already underlined the problem of Greek disunity: his was a tale of the Greeks only just banding together, with some communities spurred by local hatreds to prefer alliance with Persia. Thus intertextuality can impinge in important ways on questions of truthfulness.

To return to Lucian: Rome's war in Armenia, he says, has produced a flurry of wannabe 'Thucydideses, Herodotuses and Xenophons' (2). One, for example, mimics Thucydides with his opening 'Cepereius Calpurnianus the Pompeiopolitan wrote down the war between the Parthians and the Romans, how they warred against one another, beginning at the very outset' (15), and goes on to replicate whole cloth Thucydides' account of the plague. This extreme example suggests how overblown allusion may go beyond being a matter merely of style (a nod in the direction of a predecessor that helps secure one's own pedigree), to impinge upon content and historical interpretation: the wholesale insertion of a Thucydidean plague patently falsifies the historical record. The kind of mimicry Lucian describes may also compromise truth by imparting a misleading

stature to events. Use of a high style to recount a trivial occurrence—a minor military engagement in an inconsequential place that does not affect wider interstate relations—may thus misrepresent its significance by putting it on a par implicitly with the events selected by Herodotus or Thucydides for their accounts of the Persian Wars or Peloponnesian War.

Subtler intertextuality can also have a bearing on truthfulness: for intertextual resonances can summon up distinctive associations of how things happen, and such associations and explanations may map more or less closely on to how an event did in fact occur and what motivated it. Thus, as John Moles has argued, the Homeric resonances of Arrian's narrative (especially in the 'second preface') not only build up Arrian's self-presentation as a Homer for this latter-day Achilles, but also underscore Alexander's conception of himself as a Homeric hero, a conception that influences how he makes war (as we see also in the narrative of deeds).⁸ The resulting narrative may be closer to or further from *wie es eigentlich gewesen* (even as an absolutely objective account is unattainable). References to other genres besides history—to epic or tragedy—may equally serve to communicate an aspect of experience or a worldview. Similarly in Platonic dialogue different genres bring in their train different forms of thought that communicate particular aspects of experience, as Andrea Nightingale has brought out.⁹ In historiography too, beyond factuality, the truth communicated may be of a more philosophical character: a higher truth that encapsulates an ideal state of affairs, a sense of how the world *could* be.

In Herodotus, divergent perspectives may be connected with divergent worldviews, each of them bolstered by distinct literary references, as in the Thermopylae narrative, which is marked by two distinct registers—one more Homeric, including Leonidas' heroic choice to die for Sparta's sake and secure Spartan *kleos*, the other more reminiscent of the fifth-century sophists. Each register brings in its train a distinctive interpretation: a distinctive slant on why things happened as they did, with an emphasis on the one hand on the individual's desire for *kleos* and direct heroic action, and on the other hand, on self-interest and advantage.¹⁰

Where an author evokes contrasting literary models or textual traditions, with the different implications about the unfolding of history that each brings in its train, we are then justified in conceptualising the phenomenon in terms of the representation of plural realities or plural truths: or at least the presentation of plural *models* for getting at truth. A more generally nostalgic perspective

(recalling, for example, glorious past wars) may also stand in tension with current ways of figuring an event.

Euripides' *Helen* presents something similar but starker.¹¹ As Charles Segal has demonstrated, the play stages two worlds, neither of which is clearly the 'real': there is the grim world of Troy, on the one hand, a world of violence and destruction, peopled by a deceptive phantom made by the gods to inflict suffering on humans; and on the other hand, there is the idyllic world of Egypt with its model king and exemplary Helen who has stayed away from the war. This contrast is built up in part by means of intertexts: the world of Trojan violence stands in the tradition of depictions of the Trojan War in Homer's *Iliad* and tragedy, whereas pastoral and Odyssean references contribute to the construction of the idyllic alternative reality—the world of beauty, innocence and purity, where a faithful Penelope-like Helen has stayed away from the war.¹² Thus Euripides shows the well-known historical realm of Troy in a plural way, for greater associative power.

Xenophon, in similar fashion, invokes Herodotus and Thucydides to conjure up different models of 'how the world works', as we shall see in a moment. But first I should make clear that intertextual references to past literary depictions are not always concerned with portraying different realities in the sense of truths. More often, in historical texts, they contribute to focalisation: to the representation of an individual's *deluded* view of reality (a view that might of course have shaped his action, and so indirectly have shaped reality; and might help build up an ideal of how things could be: a symbolic truth). In Herodotus, for example, intertextuality with Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* captures the delusion of the Persian commander Mardonius as he envisages his own capture of Athens in terms of the Greeks' capture of Troy and revenge for Troy; but the comparison mainly spotlights problems with that perspective, ways in which it does *not* reflect reality (there is nothing very heroic, for instance, about this capture of an *empty* city).¹³ Similarly, Xenophon's depiction of the Spartan Phoebidas' motivation in spearheading the capture of the Theban Cadmeia points to a terrible contrast between on the one hand Phoebidas' heroic aspirations—fed by Leontiades' presentation of the situation as the equivalent of a glorious military encounter—and on the other hand the grim reality:¹⁴

Ἐξεστί σοι, ὦ Φοιβίδα, τῇδε τῇ ἡμέρᾳ μέγιστα ἀγαθὰ τῇ σεαυτοῦ πατρίδι ὑποργῆσαι· ἐὰν γὰρ ἀκολουθήσης ἐμοὶ σὺν τοῖς ὀπλίταις, εἰσάξω σε ἐγὼ εἰς τὴν ἀκρόπολιν . . . ἀκούσας δὲ ταῦτα ὁ Φοιβίδας ἀνεκουφίσθη· καὶ γὰρ ἦν τοῦ λαμπρόν τι ποιῆσαι πολὺ μᾶλλον ἢ τοῦ ζῆν ἐραστήρ, οὐ μέντοι λογιστικὸς γε οὐδὲ πάνυ φρόνιμος ἐδόκει εἶναι.

‘Phoebidas, you can on this day accomplish for your country the greatest good. For if you follow me with your hoplites, I shall lead you on to the acropolis . . .’. When Phoebidas heard this, his spirits were raised, since he had in fact a much greater passion for accomplishing some great deed than he did for life itself; he was not, however, considered a man who thought things through or possessed a high degree of intelligence.

Hellenica 5.2.26–7

Phoebidas sees an opportunity for doing a glorious deed like the sort of glorious deeds that are preserved in history (λαμπρός most often appears in the Greek historians in contexts of deeds being judged heroic, being remembered), but Xenophon’s presentation intimates that his action has a far different significance. There is nothing glorious about Phoebidas’ capture of Thebes; nor, it turns out, does it have divine support. Xenophon’s wording might actually draw attentive readers to think of the Athenian tyrannicides, who appeared in Thucydides acting impulsively and motivated by private *eros* in doing a deed that Thucydides did *not* regard as valorous (and significantly, they possessed λαμπρότης *only* ‘of youth’, 6.54.2). More broadly, the Herodotean texture of the subsequent account of the assassination of the seven polemarchs intimates that, so far from performing a glorious deed that will redound positively on their homeland and Phoebidas, the Spartans are stepping into the shoes of the Persians as the new ‘tyrants’.¹⁵

In cases like those of Mardonius or Phoebidas it is not a matter of two possible truths, two possible realities: rather, a more glorious past is contrasted with the grim reality of the present, and reveals the *delusion* of people in the present. Similarly in Euripides, intertextuality can contribute not to a different possible truth but to a deluded worldview. In his *Electra* the references to Epinician poetry and Homer on the part of Electra and the chorus as they envisage a heroic and glorious Orestes stand in stark contrast with Orestes as he actually appears (arriving in disguise, taking no initiative, acting cowardly and unheroically).

And yet focalisation need not be deluded: it can point to other, potentially valid, ways of understanding reality. The potential validity of plural truths is a concept that is especially important to Herodotus: his alternative accounts enshrine different communities’ views on the past, as well as the divergent focalisations of characters; and his explicit posture of ‘saying what is said’ (7.152.3) promotes the idea that different versions of history are worth recording in history, are cherished by those who transmit them, and may also have something of the truth to them. One could point to plenty of examples.¹⁶ At times

Herodotus indicates a preference; at times he refrains from judging. Moreover, the inclusion of such unresolved alternatives may sharpen *readers'* appreciation of some of the challenges involved in seeking truth. Thus already in the proem, the factually discrepant rival versions about how Io arrived in Phoenicia (by abduction by sailors, or willingly in shame before her parents) remind readers (as Carolyn Dewald has argued) about the partisan and partial nature of the accounts people give.¹⁷ So Herodotus firmly founds this potential of historiography.

Plural Truths at the End of *Hellenica*: the Mantinea Narrative

This background in mind, we now turn to the pluralising of the past through intertextuality in the context of military conflict in Xenophon's *Hellenica*. The end of a historiographical work is an important site for establishing its meaning,¹⁸ and ends, like beginnings, may be sites of purposeful engagement with the literary tradition. The final lines of Xenophon's *Hellenica* (7.5.26–7) thus evoke the opening of Thucydides' *History*, with its picture of the whole of Greece lining up on either side in the war, but so as to emphasise how different the outcome was from people's expectations: for no definitive victor emerged and no certainty resulted. The form of the narrative defies the notion that meaningful closure was coterminous with the war's end, with the placement of a Thucydidean opening element at *Hellenica*'s close replicating on the level of narrative the topsy-turvy new world of shifting realities in which *only* ethical ties and moral strength supplied security and certainty. In this way Xenophon at the end of his historiographical work underscored the value of his distinctive focus on character and morality.¹⁹

Beyond these final lines, however, the work's denouement taken more broadly—to embrace the entire final chapter (7.5)—stages an elegant negotiation of the historiographical tradition: but more than this, and more importantly for my purposes here, this intertextual referencing promotes a pluralistic model for getting at truth, and generates plural truths. Thus we shall see that Xenophon simultaneously invokes two different models of reality—the one implicit in Herodotus, with the truth it encapsulates in recounting Persian Wars history, and the one captured by Thucydides in recounting the Peloponnesian War. Each of these models offer Xenophon and his readers a valid lens through which to grasp the truth of and interpret more recent events, perhaps even a tool for

reshaping the current situation.²⁰

The work's final chapter (7.5) begins with the Arcadians petitioning Athens and Sparta for assistance against Thebes, which is suspected of trying to enslave the Peloponnese. The Theban commander Epaminondas meanwhile marches out and sets up camp at Tegea, quite near to Mantinea where the forces opposed to the Thebans are assembling. With no more cities joining him, and the realisation that he must take action if he is to preserve his honour, at hearing of Agesilaus' absence from Sparta Epaminondas marches there in the hope of capturing it. But by chance Agesilaus is informed and arrives back in time to defend Sparta; his tiny force somehow routs the Thebans. Obligated to withdraw, Epaminondas orders his cavalry on to Mantinea to catch livestock and people outside, but the Athenians foil his attempt; and Epaminondas prepares his men for the final showdown at Mantinea.²¹

Herodotean Strands

The account is intertextually rich. One strand recalls Persian Wars history and its presentation in Herodotus.

In the narrative of the Theban advance into the Peloponnese, the general shaping of the account as well as its detail recall Herodotus' depiction of Xerxes' campaign of the previous century. The preceding narrative has already underscored the Thebans' close association with Persia and recalled the Persian Wars and the Thebans' role in them. Desiring hegemony over Greece (7.1.33) the Thebans have approached Persia to broker an alliance, and Pelopidas has won over the Great King by citing the Thebans' medising at Plataea in 479 BC and also subsequently. Various details bring to mind Herodotus: for example, the report of Arcadian Antiochus upon returning home after accompanying Pelopidas to the Persian court, that the King had plenty of bakers and cooks and so forth but not men who could fight with Greeks, and that his golden plane tree was not even large enough to afford shade for a grasshopper (7.1.38). These details resonate with several Herodotean narratives, including Pausanias' famous comparison of dinners at which he orders Persian 'bakers and cooks' to make a Persian dinner (Hdt. 9.82), the remark that Xerxes had plenty of fighters but no men (Hdt. 7.220), and Xerxes' admiration and adornment of the beautiful plane tree (Hdt. 7.31); and in this context one might even recall Deioces' famous quip about fighting against the Persians in the shade (Hdt. 7.226). Xenophon's presentation of the Peloponnesians banding together against the

Theban threat recalls Herodotus' account of the Greeks awaiting Xerxes' advance and their sending of delegations (to Gelon, the Cretans, and others) to drum up support. After recounting Xerxes' inexorable press on the Greek cities in his path as he encroached on Greece, set on enslaving it, Herodotus delved back in time to recount how those Greeks 'who were better disposed to Greece' (Hdt. 7.145) assembled and resolved to dissolve their hostilities and send envoys around Greece to secure an alliance for defending against Persia; and the defence revolved around Sparta and Athens. Here in Xenophon, when the Thebans' plans are reported to the Arcadian assembly, the Mantineans and 'such of the other Arcadians as cared for the Peloponnese' infer that the Thebans want to weaken the Peloponnese so as to reduce it to slavery (ὅπως αὐτὴν καταδουλώσαιντο) and that they are planning how they might do so 'as easily as possible' (ὡς ῥᾶστα, 7.5.1). The Arcadians then send envoys to Athens and Sparta, asking the latter 'whether they wanted in common to join in checking any who might come to bring slavery on the Peloponnese' (7.5.3), so inviting them to live up to their traditional role and rhetoric as liberators of Greece in the Persian Wars and opponents of tyrants. The word used here is καταδουλώω, a very strong word for enslaving Greece that is used in the whole *Hellenica* only here, twice in the course of a couple of sections (7.5.1, 7.5.3); it also surfaces a few times in Thucydides (seven times) but most memorably in some of the most purple passages of Herodotus, including the Athenians' statement of their refusal to enslave Greece (Hdt. 8.144), and Miltiades in persuading Callimachus in his vote to fight at Marathon (Hdt. 6.109.3). In Xenophon, the parties' explicit discussion of the question of hegemony ('As for the matter of leadership', περὶ μέντοι ἡγεμονίας, 7.5.3) might again in this context recall the fraught nature of this issue in Herodotus, including especially in the narrative of the embassies mentioned just above, where Herodotus described a good deal of wrangling over the leadership of the prospective alliance.²²

As well as this general Herodotean texture, the behaviour of the actors in Xenophon's account harks back to the Persian War days and their presentation in Herodotus. Thus when Epaminondas calculates (ἐλογίζετο, 7.5.5) that there will be Theban allies in the Peloponnese, along with other small cities *compelled* (ἡναγκάζοντο, 7.5.5) by their intermediary location to side with the Thebans, he seems to act the part of a new Xerxes; and the details that the *Phocians* declined to join him, and that the many Thessalians who did come 'both from Alexander and from his opponents' (7.5.4) likewise take us back to Herodotus' *Histories*, with its emphasis on the Phocians' presence on the Greek side and the role of Alexander of Macedon.

Epaminondas' concern with reputation sets him in line with both Herodotean Persian Kings (with the pressure on them to be seen to act appropriately to their position) and Spartan Leonidas and his Homeric antecedents. First, seeing that time is passing and no cities are coming over to him, Epaminondas 'perceives (ἐνόμισε) he has to take some action' (7.5.9): otherwise, 'in the place of his former fame, he will incur much disgrace' (ἀντὶ τῆς πρόσθεν εὐκλείας πολλὴν ἄδοξίαν προσεδέχετο); and so he leads his army 'directly' (εὐθύς) against Sparta (7.5.9). Divine chance alone prevents his capture of the city—a capture in epic style, as Xenophon brings out with an Iliadic metaphor (perhaps specifically reminiscent of the Trojan War portent at *Iliad* 2.311²³) and also with an 'if-not' construction that highlight Sparta's hair's-breadth escape:

if a Cretan by some divine fate (θείᾳ τινὶ μοίρᾳ) had not come and reported to Agesilaus that the army was advancing, he would have captured the city, just like a nest entirely empty of its defenders (ὥσπερ νεοττιᾶν παντάπασιν ἔρημον τῶν ἀμυνομένων).

Hellenica 7.5.10

θείᾳ μοίρᾳ appears only here in the *Hellenica*, and again recalls the world of Homer and of Herodotus' *Histories*, where significant events quite commonly occur 'by divine chance' or 'with divine guidance', including the chance meeting of individuals; the *eite* . . . *eite* . . . construction just above is also Herodotean.²⁴

The failure to take Sparta prompts Epaminondas to try his hand at a cavalry manoeuvre outside Mantinea: but when petitioned by the Mantineans, the Athenians take no account (οὐδεν . . . ἐπελογίσαντο, 7.5.16) of the greater number of the enemy, their own cavalry's misfortune in a previous engagement, or of the fact that they are about to fight with the very best cavalry forces (Thebans and Thessalians), but are motivated by thoughts of the past, 'eagerly desiring to win back their ancestral reputation (ἀνασώσασθαι τὴν πατρῴαν δόξαν)' (7.5.16). And they do indeed replay the well-established story of Athenian generosity: they become responsible for saving everything outside the walls (αἵτιοι . . . τὰ ἔξω πάντα σωθῆναι) for the Mantineans. Thus they live up in a sense to the example of their ancestors, whom famously Herodotus judged to be saviours of Greece in the Persian Wars (cf. 7.139). Xenophon highlights their achievement: 'Here, again, who would not admire the valour (τὴν ἀρετὴν) of these men?' (7.5.16).

At Epaminondas' second failure, Xenophon includes a strikingly lengthy ascription of motivation:

ὁ δ' αὖ Ἐπαμεινώνδας, ἐννυμύμενος ὅτι ὀλίγων μὲν ἡμερῶν ἀνάγκη ἔσοιτο ἀπέναι διὰ τὸ ἐξήκειν τῇ στρατείᾳ τὸν χρόνον, εἰ δὲ καταλείψοι ἐρήμους οἷς ἦλθε σύμμαχος, ἐκεῖνοι πολιορκήσονται ὑπὸ τῶν ἀντιπάλων, αὐτὸς δὲ λελυμασμένος τῇ ἑαυτοῦ δόξῃ παντάπασιν ἔσοιτο, ἡττημένος μὲν ἐν Λακεδαίμονι σὺν πολλῶ ὀπλιτικῶ ὑπ' ὀλίγων, ἡττημένος δὲ ἐν Μαντινείᾳ ἱππομαχίᾳ, αἴτιος δὲ γεγεννημένος διὰ τὴν εἰς Πελοπόννησον στρατείαν τοῦ συνεστάναι Λακεδαιμονίους καὶ Ἀρκάδας καὶ Ἀχαιοὺς καὶ Ἥλείους καὶ Ἀθηναίους· ὥστε οὐκ ἐδόκει αὐτῷ δυνατόν εἶναι ἀμαχεῖ παρελθεῖν, λογιζομένῳ ὅτι εἰ μὲν νικῶν, πάντα ταῦτα ἀναλύσοιτο· εἰ δὲ ἀποθάνοι, καλὴν τὴν τελευτήν ἡγήσατο ἔσεσθαι πειωμένῳ τῇ πατρίδι ἀρχὴν Πελοποννήσου καταλιπεῖν.

And Epaminondas, on the other hand, considering that within a few days he would have to depart because the time for the campaign was running out, and that if he should leave abandoned those to whom he had come as an ally, they would be besieged by their adversaries, and his reputation would be completely destroyed: for with a great force of hoplites he had been defeated in Lacedaemon by a few, and defeated in Mantinea in a cavalry battle, and because of his expedition into the Peloponnese he had become the cause of the union of Lacedaemonians and Arcadians and Achaeans and Eleans and Athenians; with the upshot that it did not seem possible for him to withdraw without a battle, and he considered that if he won, he would make up for all these things; while he reasoned that if he should die, such a death would be glorious for one who was striving to leave behind for his fatherland rule over the Peloponnese.

Hellenica 7.5.18

Recalled here is Herodotus' depiction of Leonidas' motives at a crucial moment in the lead-up to the battle of Thermopylae (Hdt. 7.220): Xenophon evokes a similar combination of the commander's concern for his allies and concern to shape a glorious reputation for himself; and he gives a similar sense of the press of necessity (stemming in Leonidas' case from the betrayal of the pass, but also from an oracle dating from the beginning of the war). In both cases the ascription of motivation underlines the significance of the moment, as the commander assesses the situation and resolves to remain and cement a heroic reputation, rather than to withdraw.

Here, however, Xenophon intrudes in his authorial voice to stake an emphatic claim²⁵ about what is really remarkable about this:

τὸ μὲν οὖν αὐτὸν τοιαῦτα διανοεῖσθαι οὐ πάνυ μοι δοκεῖ θαυμαστὸν εἶναι· φιλοτίμων γὰρ ἀνδρῶν τὰ τοιαῦτα διανοήματα· τὸ μέντοι <τὸ> στράτευμα παρεσκευακέναι ὡς πόνον τε μηδὲνα ἀποκάμνειν μήτε νυκτὸς μήτε ἡμέρας, κινδύνου τε μηδενὸς ἀφίστασθαι, σπάνιά τε τάπιτήδεια ἔχοντας ὅμως πείθεσθαι ἐθέλειν, ταῦτά μοι δοκεῖ θαυμαστότερα εἶναι.

That he thought such things does not at all seem to me to be wondrous; for such thoughts are the mark of ambitious men. The fact, however, that he had prepared his army so that it flinched from no toil, whether by night or day, and

shrank from no danger, but though provisions were in short supply, nonetheless it was willing to obey: this seems to me to be more wondrous.

Hellenica 7.5.19

With the Herodotean vocabulary of *thomata* (wonders) in combination with μοι δοκεῖ, Xenophon gestures to the focus in Herodotean explanation—and before that, in Homer—on the individual commander’s motivations and striving for *kleos*, only to redefine what is truly remarkable and important as not what the commander *thought*, but what he has inspired his men to *do*.

The men’s disposition towards their commander—their willing obedience—renders immaterial the condition of τὰ ἐπιτήδεια, in a nod in the direction this time of Thucydidean historiography. The παρασκευή terms here and throughout the rest of the account²⁶ perhaps then hint—in resistance to Thucydides’ emphasis on παρασκευή—that the *only* ‘preparation’ that really counts is that of the army itself; and finally the idea of ‘willing obedience’ is concretised in the sketch of Epaminondas’ soldiers on the occasion of his final order to prepare for battle, with horsemen eagerly (προθύμως) whitening their helmets, Arcadian hoplites painting clubs on their shields as if they were themselves Thebans, and all alike whetting spears and daggers and burnishing shields (7.5.20).

Xenophon continues: ‘When he led out the army, having been thus prepared (οὕτω παρεσκευασμένους), it is again worth reflecting (ἄξιον αὖ κατανοῆσαι) on what he did’ (7.5.21). *Axion* is a buzzword of historiographical discourse and suggests that Xenophon may here be purposefully redefining assumptions of what is *axion* in historiography, while κατανοῆσαι claims from readers a more reflective engagement with the text and spotlights the distinctly philosophical aspects of Xenophon’s project.²⁷ What turns out to be worthy of reflection is Epaminondas’ astonishing leadership, displayed especially in his manipulation of morale on both sides and tactical organisation. Epaminondas first forms his battle line as expected, seeming to be about to engage. But next he confounds expectations, marching away and grounding arms as if encamping; ‘and by so doing he caused among most of the enemy a relaxation of their psychological preparation for battle (τὴν ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς πρὸς μάχην παρασκευήν), and a relaxation of their (preparation) as regards their battle array (τὴν ἐν ταῖς συντάξεσιν)’ (7.5.22). Confounding expectations again, he now wheels his men around into formation and orders them to take up arms, and ‘he led, and they followed’. Caught off guard, the enemy race to various tasks, ‘all like men who are about

to suffer, rather than to inflict, harm’ (7.5.22). Next Epaminondas leads his army ‘prow-first, just like a trireme’, and considering (νομίζων) that wherever he can cut through he will destroy his adversaries’ army, he prepares to contend (παρεσκευάζετο ἀγωνίζεσθαι) with the strongest part of his force, stationing the weaker far back, ‘knowing (εἰδὼς) that if defeated it would cause discouragement to his men, but give strength to the enemy’ (7.5.23). In his reflection (νομίζων) that after cutting through the enemy cavalry ‘he will have defeated the whole enemy; for it is very difficult to find men who will be willing to stay (μάλ’ ἂν χαλεπὸν εὐρεῖν τοὺς ἐθελήσοντας μένειν), when they see some of their own side in flight’ (7.5.24), character and authorial perspectives coalesce, in the uncertain ownership of the generalising *gar* (‘for’) clause. He stations troops on the hills behind the Athenians, desiring to instill fear that they will be attacked from behind if they assist (7.5.24).

Finally Xenophon juxtaposes this lengthy sketch of Epaminondas’ motivation with the briefest possible narration—in only a sentence—of the actual clash, which occurs entirely in accordance with Epaminondas’ expectations:

καὶ οὐκ ἐψεύσθη τῆς ἐλπίδος κρατήσας γὰρ ἥ προσέβαλεν ὄλον ἐποίησε φεύγειν τὸ τῶν ἐναντίων.

And he was not deceived in his hope: for by gaining mastery at that point where he struck, he caused the entire enemy to flee.

Hellenica 7.5.24

By displacing all focus to before the battle, Xenophon underscores that *this* is where the real achievement is to be witnessed. Advance preparation is as relevant to historical outcomes as the battle itself, and indeed is more effective in revealing a man’s leadership capacity—which in turn reflects his character, so illuminating an ethical truth.

What happens next suggests still further the excellence of Epaminondas’ personal leadership, since when he falls, his men can no longer perform. Instead of taking advantage of the victory, they cave in (7.5.25). In the astonishingly indecisive final outcome of the battle, Xenophon sees the hand of god (cf. pp. 161–162 above and p. 166 below):

ὁ δὲ θεὸς οὕτως ἐποίησεν ὥστε ἀμφοτέροι μὲν τροπαῖον ὡς νενικηκότες ἐστήσαντο, τοὺς δὲ ἱσταμένους οὐδέτεροι ἐκώλυνον, νεκροὺς δὲ ἀμφοτέροι μὲν ὡς νενικηκότες ὑποσπόνδους ἀπέδωκαν, ἀμφοτέροι δὲ ὡς ἡττημένοι ὑποσπόνδους ἀπελάμβανον, νενικηκέναι δὲ φάσκοντες ἑκάτεροι οὔτε χώρα οὔτε πόλει οὔτ’ ἀρχῇ οὐδέτεροι οὐδὲν πλέον ἔχοντες ἐφάνησαν ἢ πρὶν τήν

μάχην γενέσθαι: ἀκρισία δὲ καὶ ταραχὴ ἔτι πλείων μετὰ τὴν μάχην ἐγένετο ἢ πρόσθεν ἐν τῇ Ἑλλάδι.

But the deity so ordered it that each side set up a trophy as though victorious and neither tried to prevent those who set them up, that each gave back the dead under a truce as if victorious, and each received back their dead under a truce as if defeated, and that while each side claimed to be victorious, neither was seen to be any better off in having any additional territory, or city, or rule than before the battle took place; but there was even more confusion and disorder in Greece after the battle than before.

Hellenica 7.5.26–7

The Herodotean worldview, or model of grasping the past, is then relevant: it helps us comprehend aspects of the Mantinea campaign, including the element of divine agency; and there may be the further implication that Epaminondas is mindfully shaping his actions on the model of a Herodotean/Persian Wars hero like Leonidas, much as the Athenians live up to the example of their former selves. At the same time, that model takes us only so far: it contains only a partial truth. Xenophon would appear to be refining and updating this model.

Thucydidean Strands

A second strand of the account, which I shall review more briefly, stands in the tradition of Thucydidean historiographical analysis—the attention to military detail, practical factors, the key importance of παρασκευή (preparation) and ἀσφάλεια (safety); the vocabulary of advantage; the technique of staging congruence and conflict between thoughts (λόγοι) and outcomes (ἔργα); and the staging of how perceptions shape history.²⁸ Thus Xenophon traces Epaminondas' thought processes in determining carefully and intelligently how best to attack after he first arrives at Sparta, where presentation through negation draws attention to a contrast between his action and what someone with less expertise might have elected to do.²⁹ These areas of Thucydidean affinity together conjure up a world of Thucydidean historical processes, so generating an explanatory truth, even as each aspect is again given distinctly Xenophontic shape. The concern with παρασκευή and with perceptions is, for example, focalised almost exclusively though the gaze of the Theban commander, and presented so as to articulate lessons of leadership far more clearly than in Thucydides.³⁰ And ultimately the focus on practical factors and the commander's controlling intelligence is complicated by the final, explicit emphasis on factors more reminiscent of Herodotean historiography: the pluralising of explanatory possibilities with double explanation, and the role of the divine as a force that restores

balance.³¹ When the Spartans are elated and pursue farther than is fitting, Xenophon remarks that they ‘in turn (αὖ) were slain’, ‘for it had been ordained, as it seemed, by the god, to what point (μέχρι ὅσου) victory had been given to them’ (7.5.13). Thus Xenophon explains the Thebans’ highly improbable failure to resist Agesilaus.

Again, when Epaminondas urges his horsemen on to Mantinea, instructing (διδάσκων) that in accordance with probability (εἰκός) cattle and men alike will be outside the city, the description of what ensues corroborates in detail his expectations in Thucydidean fashion.³² But again, the final outcome exposes factors that may trump such pragmatic calculations: *by chance* the Athenian horsemen are approaching Mantinea or are already within the city (ἐτύγχανον προσιόντες . . . καὶ καταστρατοπεδευσάμενοι, 7.5.15³³); and their *friendship* with the Mantineans prompts them to come to their aid. The sense of obligation the relationship engenders (cf. αἰσχυνόμενοι, 7.5.16) overrides the Athenians’ accounting of such practical factors (cf. οὐδεν . . . ἐπελογίσαντο, 7.5.16) as not having eaten, their perception of the Thebans’ great numerical superiority, their own horsemen’s failure at Corinth, and the fact they are about to fight the Thebans and Thessalians—reputed the best of horsemen. Instead they act valorously (ἄρετή, 7.5.16), saving the day for the Mantineans, and the detail that they ‘did not abandon friendly corpses (τοὺς . . . φιλίους νεκροὺς)’ (7.5.17) re-emphasises by presentation through negation the key explanatory factor of *philia*, which the Athenians respect even beyond the grave. Friendship represents a wild card that may trump even the most intelligent leadership.

Finally—confounding probability, and in the teeth of the lucid expectations of this highly intelligent commander—Epaminondas’ superb preparation and indeed the resultant victory (cf. 7.5.25: οἱ λοιποὶ οὐδὲ τῇ νίκῃ ὀρθῶς ἔτι ἐδυνάσθησαν χρήσασθαι, ‘those who were left were no longer able to take proper advantage of the victory’) fails to issue in ultimate triumph for the Thebans. Epaminondas has been thwarted once again by bad luck and the gods.

Conclusion

Invoking the twin giants of the historiographical tradition, Xenophon augments his own authority in telling a tale of war to an audience steeped in the history of war. Even as he stands on the shoulders of both predecessors, he implies the greater usefulness of his own more philosophical history, with its heightened appreciation of ethical factors, for his readers who are living in the world of the fourth

century.³⁴ But the strategy is not only rhetorical. The combination of Herodotean and Thucydidean intertextuality also creates a doubleness of temporal perspectives: one looking back to the Persian Wars past, the other outwards to the confusing world after the Peloponnesian War. Each of these perspectives, among others, highlights a dimension of the truth Xenophon wishes to convey, by spotlighting certain factors as important to how and why events unfolded as they did.³⁵ Herodotean intertextuality points to truths of a moral, ethical and (in their indication of divine agency) metaphysical character, whereas Thucydidean intertextuality exposes more practical, *realpolitiker* truths. Xenophon would seem to be suggesting that each perspective generates only part of the truth; and indeed that a pluralistic model is essential for grasping what are complex, plural truths.

The Herodotean resonances also suggest a nostalgia for the past on the part of participants, transporting readers into the frame of mind of people on both sides: Athenians, who are looking back to a century earlier when there was more moral clarity, when Greeks led by Spartans and Athenians banded together to stave off a foreign threat, and when the winners were obvious; Thebans refashioning themselves as having fought on the right side of that glorious war. Thus they raise the spectre of a higher, better reality: one that readers may aspire to create once again. Xenophon's picture of the Arcadians under Epaminondas' extraordinary leadership transforming themselves symbolically into Thebans (mentioned above, p. 163)—

καὶ γὰρ ὅτε τὸ τελευταῖον παρήγγειλεν αὐτοῖς παρασκευάζεσθαι ὡς μάχης ἐσομένης, προθύμως μὲν ἐλευκοῦντο οἱ ἵππεῖς τὰ κράνη κελεύοντος ἐκείνου, ἐπεγράφοντο δὲ καὶ <οἱ> τῶν Ἀρκάδων ὁπλῖται ῥόπαλα, ὡς Θηβαῖοι ὄντες, πάντες δὲ ἡκονῶντο καὶ λόγχας καὶ μαχαίρας καὶ ἐλαμπρύνοντο τὰς ἀσπίδας.

And when finally he gave the order to his men to prepare—for the battle was imminent—eagerly the cavalry were whitening their helmets at his command, the Arcadian hoplites were painting clubs on their shields, as if they were Thebans, and all alike were sharpening their spears and swords and burnishing their shields.

Hellenica 7.5.20

—presents a vivid example of just how such an aspirational reality might triumph over mere factuality.³⁶ The Herodotean model is perhaps better suited to conveying truths about this new, complex world in which the Thucydidean bi-polar model has fallen apart, and the larger city-states as well as powerful individuals are now jostling for hegemony and for the support of foreign powers.

Xenophon invokes Herodotean and Thucydidean intertexts to assist his readers in grasping a richer truth about important events of the preceding half-century, even as he stamps his historical narrative with his own distinctly philosophical outlook and evaluation. For Xenophon, acolyte of the philosopher Socrates, highest on the totem pole of truths, both in its significance *per se* and in its explanatory value, sits ethical truth. Ethical achievement influences historical outcomes and offers a rare source of stability in a world of flux.³⁷

Notes

- 1 See esp. Marincola (1997).
- 2 As C. Darbo-Peschanski expresses it in her contribution to this volume; the wording is from her original paper, in French.
- 3 Wesselman (2011) and in her paper in this volume, section entitled ‘Many Shades of Truth’.
- 4 On which see Morello (2002), O’Gorman (2006), the contributions in Powell (2013), Grethlein (2013).
- 5 Cf. Rood (2004, 353–8). The title is that of Damon (2010).
- 6 Postmodernist perspectives regarding the past as *only* accessible through its emplotment in narrative do, however, suggest a more complicated view: see the Introduction, 5–6.
- 7 Rood (1999).
- 8 Moles (1985, 163). Illuminating remarks on intertextuality and truth, and the distinctiveness of intertextuality in historiography, in O’Gorman (2009), Damon (2010), Levene (2010, 84–6), Pelling (2013).
- 9 Nightingale (1995), cf. Mastronarde (2010: 222–47) on how in tragedy the *agon* enshrines different worldviews; Baragwanath (2012b) on Homeric and tragic allusion in Herodotus’ account of Mardonius.
- 10 I laid out an argument along these lines in Baragwanath (2008, ch. 3).
- 11 The play was referred to by several presenters at the original conference panel on Plural Truths. See especially Wright, this volume.
- 12 The play, Segal suggests, asks whether ‘reality’ is more akin to the former or the latter (1971, 613).
- 13 Herodotus 9.3 with Baragwanath (2012b, 300–310).
- 14 Leontiades’ speech perhaps indeed recalls Miltiades’ encouragement of Callimachus before Marathon (Hdt. 6.109.3).
- 15 The account closely echoes Herodotus’ story of the seven Macedonians who assassinate the Persians on an embassy to Macedon, sent by Darius (Gray 1989, 65–70; Dillery 1995, 229–30; Baragwanath, forthcoming).
- 16 E.g. 5.87: the Argives claim they annihilated the Athenians’ force, the Athenians claim it was a divine act; 6.84: the Lacedaemonians say Cleomenes died from drunkenness, the Argives that it was the consequence of madness. A list of Herodotean alternative accounts may be found in Lateiner (1989, 84–90). See also Wesselmann (esp. section ‘*Se non è vero*’) in this volume.
- 17 Dewald (1999). See also Baragwanath (2008, 122–59).
- 18 Cf. Marincola (2005).

- 19 For further detail and references see Baragwanath (2012a, 339–40).
- 20 For intertextuality in Xenophon's *Hellenica* with Herodotus: Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Letter to Pompeius* 4.1–4, with Gray (1989, 1–9); with Thucydides' *Histories*: Rood (2004), Nicolai (2006, 695–706, with acknowledgement too of contact with Herodotus; 2010), Hornblower (2011, 291–3); additional secondary bibliography at Tamiolaki (2009, 18, nn. 9–10). Emphasising the presence of intertextuality with *both* predecessors: Tamiolaki (2009), Baragwanath (2012a). See also Rahn (1971), Tuplin (1993, 36–41), Dillery (1995, 123–7), Gray (2003), Pownall (2004, 80–82).
- 21 On Xenophon's account of Mantinea, *inter alia*: Higgins (1977, 117–20), Gray (1989, 170–75), Tuplin (1993, 156–7), Dillery (1995, 20–38), Sterling (2004) (following Henry (1967, 200–201) and Higgins (1977, 119) in underscoring that the praise of Epaminondas' leadership disproves theories of Xenophon's anti-Theban bias), Ferrario (2014, 263–5).
- 22 Cf. also other memorable occasions—including Hdt. 8.3.6 (account of the Athenians' initial high-minded decision to waive their right to *hegemonia*, followed by their back-peddalling), Hdt. 9.122 (the problem addressed and resolved: each people will sustain their hold on it while in their own territory).
- 23 I thank Roger Brock for this observation. As he points out, *neott-/neoss-** words are not common earlier than Xenophon; Herodotus uses *neossia* and cognates, but only of crocodiles and birds with cinnamon in their nests.
- 24 θείῃ τύχῃ in Herodotus: 3.139, 4.48, 5.92 and 1.126 (last two examples within character speech); θείῃ πομπῇ: 1.62 (of Pisistratus encountering Amphilytus), 3.77, 4.152.2, 8.94, cf. 7.16β1 (θεοῦ τινὸς πομπῇ, in character speech). θεῖα μοῖρα elsewhere in Xenophon: *Mem.* 2.3.18, *Poroi* 1.5. For Xenophon as Herodotean in his conception of the role of the divine, see Dillery (1995, 224), Tamiolaki (2009, 26, with further references at n. 30); Gray (1989, 175) on divine agency as well as the theme of limit and balance in Xenophon's account of Mantinea as Herodotean, but 'also more broadly speaking philosophic'. Also Herodotean (cf. Marincola (1989, 218–19)) are οὐδέν μοι δοκεῖ (7.5.8), οὐ πάνυ μοι δοκεῖ (7.5.19), τὸ μέντοι . . . ταῦτά μοι δοκεῖ (7.5.19).
- 25 Cf. οὐ πάνυ μοι δοκεῖ; τὸ μέντοι . . . ταῦτά μοι δοκεῖ.
- 26 Cf. 7.5.21: παρεσκευασμένους, 7.5.22: τὴν ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς πρὸς μάχην παρασκευήν, 7.5.23: παρεσκευάζετο.
- 27 More generally on Xenophon's redefinition of what is great or noteworthy in historiography see Gray (1989, esp. 1–9), Dillery (1995, 123–76), Baragwanath (2012a).
- 28 Each of these aspects has a presence, but a more subdued presence, in Herodotus.
- 29 He did not enter the city where his troops would have to fight on ground level, or where they would have no advantage from their numbers; but rather 'after taking that place where he believed he would enjoy an advantage' (ἐνθεν δὲ πλεονεκτεῖν ἂν ἐνόμιζε), he undertook to descend and not ascend into the city (7.5.11). For 'presentation through negation' and its frequent use by Thucydides see Hornblower (1994).
- 30 The distance between Xenophon's authorial perspective and that of his expert commander at times comes close to collapsing, in a move that gives simultaneous authority to author and character. Compare the focus on preparations in Xenophon's depiction of Agesilaus' workshop of war in Ephesus: *Hell.* 3.4.16–19, with Pownall (2004, 83–4). On *paraskeue* in Thuc., see Allison

- (1989), Kallett-Marx (1993), Foster (2010).
- 31 E.g. Herodotus on the divine regulating animal births in the natural world (Hdt. 3.108), or levelling the playing field in the conflict between Greeks and Persians (Hdt. 8.13).
 - 32 διδάσκων ὡς πάντα μὲν εἰκὸς ἔξω εἶναι τὰ τῶν Μαντινέων βοσκήματα, πάντας δὲ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ἄλλως τε καὶ σίτου συγκομιδῆς οὔσης (7.5.14) ~ ἔξω γὰρ εἶναι καὶ τὰ βοσκήματα πάντα καὶ τοὺς ἐργάτας, πολλοὺς δὲ καὶ παῖδας καὶ γεραιτέρους τῶν ἐλευθέρων (7.5.15). See Hunter (1973) for Thucydides' method of presenting motivations as congruent with outcomes.
 - 33 The emphasis in the wider narrative on 'chance' suggests that it is to be felt strongly here.
 - 34 Baragwanath (2012a) develops this argument further, with different examples.
 - 35 My focus has been intertextuality with historiography, but other non-historiographical perspectives contribute to the picture as well, for example the Athenian funeral oration, resonances of which heighten the sense of an ideal to aspire to (e.g. 7.5.15–17: the idea of fighting for allies, rather than for one's own benefit, is a theme of *epitaphioi*).
 - 36 I thank Nicolas Wiater for suggesting the possibility here of a metatextual reading.
 - 37 I would like to thank the organisers of the panel at the Celtic Classics Conference in Bordeaux, Lisa Hau and Ian Ruffell, and panel participants for their helpful feedback. Especial thanks are due to Lisa Hau, Ian Ruffell, Nicolas Wiater, Richard Fernando Buxton and Edith Foster. A UNC Global Studies Grant funded my travel to Bordeaux, and I thank our Chair in the Classics Department, Cecil Wooten, for his role in enabling this.

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9 Ctesias of Cnidus

Poet, Novelist or Historian?

Alexander Meeus

Ctesias of Cnidus, a writer of *Persica* and *Indica*, is a problematic author:¹ he seems to have been known as unreliable in antiquity, the fragments show that he is often wrong—sometimes apparently by choice so as to contradict Herodotus—and for the modern reader much of the material in the fragments is not very historical.² For all these reasons, he has not met with positive appreciation from modern scholars,³ and it has even been doubted whether Ctesias is to be considered a historian at all.⁴ Certain recent studies have attempted to present a more positive image of Ctesias by arguing that he never aimed to write pure history. Thus, Llewellyn-Jones (2010, 70–71) contends that ‘at no point was Ctesias under the illusion that he was writing straight history’. For Stronk (2007, 45), Ctesias can be considered ‘partly as a, perhaps rather poor, historian, primarily however as a “poet” in the sense of “writer of historical fiction” or “creative writer”’. He claims that ‘Ctesias “reworks” historical facts and thus transforms various occurrences into his version of the truth. In his work history has merely become a part of the plot. What happened or what was said to have happened or even what could have happened and never happened at all is indistinguishably mixed. In Ctesias’ hands historiography becomes the creative narration on the basis of an—in itself potentially reliable—historical nucleus: one might call it “faction” or a kind of historical novel’ (Stronk 2007, 44). ‘Essentially, . . . his work has become “fiction in prose”’ (Stronk 2011, 392). A similar interpretation has been put forward by Madreiter (2012, 122–5), who deems historiographic metafiction the most appropriate label and concludes that, ‘to understand the *Persica* . . . (at least partially) as historical metafiction, is to restore to the work the value it loses when seen as historiography in the strict sense of the word’ (124).⁵ Others have concluded that the genre of Ctesias’ works cannot be established.⁶

I would argue, however, that banishing Ctesias from the ranks of history is not the solution to the problem but rather a way of avoiding it. I shall first review the evidence for the genre Ctesias belongs to,

showing that he was considered a historian in antiquity in that he is consistently associated with authors from this tradition and—in spite of all the polemics—mostly used as a reliable source of information on the past.⁷ After assessing the influence of ancient polemical practices on our understanding of Ctesias, I shall briefly consider the picture we get from the fragments. Lastly, I shall reflect on some of the problems raised by the classification of Ctesias as a historian; this will also require some reflection about modern approaches to ancient historiography.⁸

The Genre of Ctesias' Works

In spite of its status as an academic discipline, even today it is absolutely impossible to define history in such a way that all its practitioners would recognise themselves in the definition. Prescriptive approaches are unsuited to any historical study of the development of historiography,⁹ and definitions that deliberately encompass the broadest possible chronological scope are helpful in theoretical reflections on the nature of history,¹⁰ but far less so in establishing the nature of Ctesias' work. Cicero (*De orat.* 2.36) offers a definition of history in which all ancient historians are likely to have recognised themselves (obviously with differing emphases), but for the time of Ctesias, writing so soon after the publication of what came to be seen as the very first work of history, it is unclear how strongly the concept would have been understood, if any idea of such a concept would already have been formed at all.¹¹ Yet Ctesias must obviously have had an idea of what it was he wanted to do in his *Persica*, and the ancient reception of the work seems to have been rather unequivocal in attributing the work to a particular category. Even without a generic label, though, people who took an interest in intellectual matters must have noticed that the small but steadily growing number of individuals who wrote, on the basis of sources, about events that they thought had actually happened, were all doing something similar: this thing would later receive the label 'history'.¹²

The fragmentary state of Ctesias' works does not allow us to give a solid answer about his own views of the genre question, but Jacoby's (1922, 2045 and 2063) arguments for his contention that Ctesias considered himself a historian are quite strong: he claimed all the typical sources (autopsy, questioning eyewitnesses and consulting archives), and he wrote in explicit opposition to Herodotus.¹³ Especially the latter factor may have shaped the expectations of Ctesias' contemporary audience, provided that he was explicit about this from the very beginning of the work—which we obviously do not

know given the fragmentary state of the work. Much more evidence is available for the way later authors saw Ctesias' work, and it is on this material that we shall have to focus our attention.

Ctesias the Poet?

Jacoby (1922, 2045) states that later readers saw Ctesias as a poet without going further into the matter. This view, however, is based on a single passage from pseudo-Demetrius' *On Style* (215 = T14): καὶ ὅλως δὲ ὁ ποιητὴς οὗτος—ποιητὴν γὰρ <ἀν> αὐτὸν καλοῖη τις εἰκότως—ἐναργείας δημιουργός ἐστιν ἐν τῇ γραφῇ συμπάσῃ ('In short, this poet—for it would be reasonable to call him a poet—is a master of vividness throughout his work').

Stronk (2007, 51–2; 2011, 389–90) claims that the view of Ctesias as a poet is further substantiated by Photius and Dionysius of Halicarnassus. Photius (*Bibl. cod.* 72 = T13) writes:

ἔστι δὲ οὗτος ὁ συγγραφεὺς σαφὴς τε καὶ ἀφελὴς λίαν· δίο καὶ ἡδονῇ αὐτῷ σύγκρατός ἐστιν ὁ λόγος. . . ἡ δὲ ἡδονὴ τῆς ἱστορίας αὐτοῦ τὸ πλεῖστον ἐν τῇ τῶν διηγημάτων αὐτοῦ γίνεται διασκευῇ τὸ παθητικὸν καὶ ἀπροσδόκητον ἐχούσῃ πολὺ, καὶ τὸ ἐγγὺς τοῦ μυθώδους αὐτὴν διαποικίλλειν.

This historian is both very clear and simple. For this reason his writing is enjoyable. . . . The pleasure of his history comes mainly in the way he elaborates his tales with a lot of *pathos* and surprising twists and in the way it is adorned with so much variety in a way similar to fables.

Dionysius (*Comp.* 10 = T12) judges thus on the style of Ctesias: ἡ δὲ γὰρ τοῦ Κνιδίου συγγραφῆς Κτησίου καὶ ἡ τοῦ Σωκρατικοῦ Ξενοφώντος ἡδέως μὲν ὡς ἐνι μάλιστα, οὐ μὴν καλῶς γ' ἐφ' ὅσον ἔδει ('The work of both the historian from Cnidus, Ctesias, and the Socratic Xenophon contains writing that is as pleasurable as possible, but it is nevertheless not composed as beautifully as could be').¹⁴ In order to connect these two statements with Demetrius' claim that Ctesias was a poet, Stronk (2007, 50–52; 2011, 390–91) calls on Cicero (*Leg.* 1.5). When his brother Quintus asks him whether different laws apply for history and for poetry, he answers:

quippe, cum in illa omnia ad veritatem, Quinte, referantur, in hoc ad delectationem pleraque; quamquam et apud Herodotum, patrem historiae, et apud Theopompum sunt innumerabiles fabulae.

Certainly, Quintus; for in history the standard by which everything is judged is the truth, while in poetry it is generally the pleasure one gives; however, in the works of Herodotus, the Father of History, and in those of Theopompus, one

Therefore, Stronk takes the pleasure that Ctesias provides according to Photius and Dionysius as a confirmation that Ctesias was seen as a kind of poet. However, historians in antiquity—and later—also had the aim to entertain and made no secret out of this.¹⁵ What Cicero means is that each genre has its own main criterion by which the quality of a work is judged: pleasure for poetry and truth for history. This does not exclude that a poem could contain the truth or that a work of history could be enjoyable,¹⁶ and neither does it mean that any text that is true is history or that any enjoyable piece of writing is poetry. Indeed Cicero mentions two historians who included such entertaining elements in their works, and Ctesias, as we shall see, is very often compared with these writers, especially Herodotus.¹⁷ Photius and Dionysius are simply discussing style, and their statements in no way imply that Ctesias was not a historian. Dionysius opposes the pleasurable but not sufficiently beautiful works of Ctesias and Xenophon to the beautiful but not sufficiently pleasurable works of Thucydides and Antiphon of Rhamnous, as well as to that of Herodotus, which is both beautiful and pleasurable. Thus, Dionysius is thinking very much in terms of historiography, not poetry.

That still leaves us with Demetrius' statement. Stronk (2007, 43) comments thus on his use of the word poet: 'The simple translation "author" does not quite fit, being too general. It was certainly not meant by Demetrios as a writer of poetry like Homer, nor does Ctesias' work correspond directly with that of writers of tragedies or comedies. Nevertheless I think that we have to look for an answer in this direction'. He claims that the key to Demetrius' at first sight problematic statement is to be found in the *Poetics* of Aristotle, as Demetrius' ideas seem often inspired by Aristotle. Thus, the famous passage about the difference between poetry and history is supposed to clarify the matter. Aristotle (*Poet.* 9.1 = 1451a) says that 'it is the function of a poet to relate not things that have happened, but things that may happen, i.e. that are possible in accordance with probability or necessity'. He goes on to say, as is well known, that poetry is in that sense more philosophical than history because it deals rather with universals while history is more focused on particulars, and that 'a poet must be a composer of plots rather than of verses, insofar as he is a poet according to representation, and represents actions. So even if it turns out that he is representing things that happened, he is no less a poet; for there is nothing to prevent some of the things that have happened from being the sort of things that may happen according to probability, i.e. that are possible, which is why he can make a poetic composition about them' (*Poet.* 9.2–3 = 1451b). Demetrius, then,

according to Stronk (2007, 45), means that Ctesias is a composer of plots, representing events that may, but need not, have happened.¹⁸

Rather than in Aristotle's *Poetics*, the answer simply seems to be—as with Photius and Dionysius—in the context¹⁹ of Demetrius' statement, which starts as follows (*Eloc.* 212):²⁰

ὅπερ δὲ τῷ Κτησίᾳ ἐγκαλοῦσιν ὡς ἀδολεσχοτέρῳ διὰ τὰς διλογίας, πολλαχῇ μὲν ἴσως ἐγκαλοῦσιν ὀρθῶς, πολλαχῇ δὲ οὐκ αἰσθάνονται τῆς ἐναργείας τοῦ ἀνδρός· τίθεται γὰρ ταῦτ' οἷς αὐτῷ πολλακίς, ποιοῦν ἔμφασιν πλέονα.

As for the fact that they reproach Ctesias for being too garrulous because of his repetitions, perhaps this reproach is often justified, but often they do not appreciate this man's vividness. For, when an action is repeated, using the same word twice lends greater emphasis.

Then he gives an example of how and in itself unnecessary repetition and the use of tense can make a passage more vivid (213–14), after which follows the statement with which we are here concerned (215): καὶ ὅλως δὲ ὁ ποιητὴς οὗτος—ποιητὴν γὰρ <ἄν> αὐτὸν καλοῖη τις εἰκότως—ἐναργείας δημιουργός ἐστιν ἐν τῇ γραφῇ συμπᾶσι ('In short, this poet—for it would be reasonable to call him a poet—is a master of vividness throughout his work'). Then follows another example of vividness, this time by means of a tragic dialogue in which the bad news is given only gradually. As Llewellyn-Jones (2010, 74–5) has pointed out, a similar tragic dialogue is to be found in Thucydides' scene of the Ambraciot herald (3.113), who was sent to the Athenians to recover the bodies after the confrontation at Olpai: unaware of the second battle that had taken place at Idomene in the meantime and in which even more of his countrymen had been killed than the day before at Olpai, he only gradually finds out the bad news in the course of a dialogue with an anonymous interlocutor. If such a procedure is not a problem in the history of Thucydides, then it should not be in that of Ctesias either.²¹ The concept of *enargeia* or vividness was important to many historians,²² so that the quality certainly does not set Ctesias apart from historiographical tradition.

Furthermore, such comparisons of historians or their works with poets or poetry are not uncommon. Demetrius (*Eloc.* 112–13) also sees a certain poetical nature to Herodotus' work:

τὸ δὲ ποιητικὸν ἐν λόγοις ὅτι μὲν μεγαλοπρεπές, καὶ τυφλῷ δῆλόν φασι, πλὴν οἱ μὲν γυμνῇ πάνυ χρῶνται τῇ μνήσῃ τῶν ποιητῶν, μᾶλλον δὲ οὐ μνήσῃ, ἀλλὰ μεταθέσει, καθάπερ Ἡρόδοτος. Θουκυδίδης μὲντοι κἂν λάβῃ παρὰ ποιητοῦ τι, ἰδίως αὐτῷ χρώμενος ἴδιον τὸ ληφθὲν ποιεῖ.

Poetic vocabulary in prose adds grandeur, as, in the words of the proverb, even

a blind man can see. Still, some writers imitate the poets quite crudely, or rather, they do not imitate but plagiarise them, as Herodotus has done. Contrast Thucydides. Even if he borrows vocabulary from a poet, he uses it in his own way and makes it his own property.²³

Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Th.* 23), again clearly just concerning himself with style, is rather more positive about what he terms the poetic quality of Herodotus' work:

οὗτος δὲ κατὰ τὴν ἐκλογὴν τῶν ὀνομάτων καὶ κατὰ τὴν σύνθεσιν καὶ κατὰ τὴν τῶν σχηματισμῶν ποικιλίαν μακρῶ δὴ τινι τοὺς ἄλλους ὑπερεβάλετο, καὶ παρεσκεύασε τῇ κρατίστῃ ποιήσει τὴν πεζὴν φράσιν ὁμοίαν γενέσθαι πειθοῦς τε καὶ χαρίτων καὶ τῆς εἰς ἄκρον ἡκούσης ἡδονῆς ἔνεκα.

This historian was far superior to the rest in his choice of words, his composition and his varied use of figures of speech; and he made his prose style resemble the finest poetry by its persuasiveness, its charm and its utterly delightful effect.

Heracleodorus, a literary theorist only known from references by Philodemus, is cited in *On Poetry* (F199 Janko = Heracleodorus F10) as belonging to a group of critics who considered content, words and even metre irrelevant to the definition of poetry, rather using it as a general label of literary quality:

π[οητὰς] τοὺς] ἀκριβῶντας κ[ατονομά]ζουσιν . . ., ‘πο]ήματα’ φάσκων ‘τὰ [Δη]μοσθένους καὶ [τὰ Ξενο]φώντος, μᾶλλον [δὲ καὶ] τὰ Ἡροδότου, καί[τοι κατὰ] τὴν συνθήκην [ἐκάστου συ]γγράφο[ν]τος’

They call those who achieve perfection ‘poets’ . . ., and he [i.e. Heracleodorus] says that the works of Demosthenes and Xenophon, and yet more so those of Herodotus, are ‘poems’, although according to convention each is a prose writer. (trans. Janko, adapted)

In a very perceptive analysis of these passages De Jonge (2008, 363) comments that ‘the interesting consequence of the views of Dionysius and Heracleodorus is that ποίησις and ποίημα (“poetry”) become terms that can be used in two different ways. On the one hand, “poetry” still designates a text in verses, with a certain special vocabulary and licence. On the other hand, “poetry” gets a new meaning: it becomes the general term that covers all literature which is characterised by aesthetic quality’.²⁴ Himerius (*Or.* 14 [= 48 Penella] 27) in turn also calls the *Histories* a ποίησις, likewise in appreciation of the style and narrative quality and again in a context where only prose authors are concerned, listing Herodotus alongside Hellanicus and Duris.²⁵

Herodotus is, furthermore, often compared with Homer: Dionysius

of Halicarnassus (*Pomp.* 3.11) describes him as Ὀμήρου ζηλωτής. The author of *On the sublime* calls him Ὀμηρικώτατος in his imitation of the poets (*De subl.* 13.2–3), and the so-called Salmacis Inscription or ‘Pride of Halicarnassus’, a Hellenistic encomium of the city in an inscription recently discovered there, styles him τὸν πεζὸν ἐν ἱστορίαισιν Ὅμηρον (‘the prose Homer in the realm of history’, *SEG* 48.1330.43, trans. Lloyd-Jones).²⁶ Demetrius also points out poetical aspects in other prose writers, again just because of their style (e.g. *Eloc.* 89 on Xenophon and 286 on Demades). Thus, when not imposing modern expectations on the Greek term and reading Demetrius’ statement in context, it becomes clear that the testimonium cannot be used as evidence for the genre of Ctesias’ work: the only way in which he is to be seen as a poet, is in the vividness of his language (see also Lenfant 2009, 316 n. 2). To claim that that as such reveals fictionality, would be equal to claiming that Mommsen’s Roman history is a work of fiction because he won the Nobel Prize for literature. Indeed, history was widely deemed to be *proxima poetis* in antiquity, a judgement based on its narrative and commemorative dimension rather than on method;²⁷ even a historian as serious as Polybius (12.25g–i) put forward Homer as a model for the vividness historiography had to achieve in order to be truly useful, by which he surely did not mean to compromise history’s truthfulness.

Ctesias the Novelist?

We are now to examine the arguments for considering Ctesias a novelist.²⁸ The method applied most often by scholars arguing that Ctesias is a kind of proto- novelist, is to search the fragments of his work and identify elements that would later also occur in the Greek novels. Any potentially relevant aspect is then interpreted within that framework, and within that framework alone. To be sure, there are novelistic elements in Ctesias’ works, and these may even have inspired certain of the later novelists, without implying that Ctesias is the direct father of the genre.²⁹ Elements that have been adduced by scholars include the unadorned style in which the work is written, the theme of unrequited love, the novel-like character development, novelistic digressions, peripeteiai, and—as we have already seen—tragic dialogue.³⁰ In the latter case, I have already argued that this occurs in other works of historiography too, and certainly does not connect Ctesias’ work with the novel alone, even if he may have used the procedure more often than other historians—there are two fragments, but one is limited to a single question and answer, and we have no idea whether they proportionally reflect the occurrence of the

Although it was not common in historiography, the simple style is,³² again, not unique to the novel, all the more so since Ctesias wrote centuries before the emergence of the first novel. Admittedly we have no real idea when that was, but the consensus is that it was not before the first century BC.³³ At most this might make Ctesias a mediocre author from a literary point of view (though see the views of Demetrius, Photius and Dionysius above), but it does not as such disqualify him as a historian.

Love stories are the next element (Holzberg 1993, 82–3; Auberger 1995, 58–64). Auberger (1995, 58–60 and 61) has argued at some length that the emotion of love plays no role in the serious literature of antiquity. Apart from some tragic heroines who gave in to this emotion out of female weakness, the image of the relationship between men and women in ancient literature is simply that of heroic men who have to possess a woman in the same way as they have to possess weapons: to them, women are chattel. Only the novelists, it is argued, share Ctesias' representation of the sentiment, with men being completely overwhelmed by love so much so that it can even drive them to suicide when they lose their lover or when their love is unanswered (Auberger 1995, 60–64). At least in a Near Eastern context, however, Ctesias' stories are not entirely unique in Greek historiography, as Herodotus' account of Xerxes' love for the wife of his brother Masistes shows (9.108); Herodotus even concludes the entire episode of Masistes' fall with a reference to 'Xerxes' love', thus emphasising its importance.³⁴ Justin (Trogus?) (7.3.9) has Darius' general Boubares abandon a campaign against the Macedonians after falling in love with the daughter of their king Amyntas. Phylarchus seems to have included at least two love stories in his historical work (Whitmarsh 2013, 21), which does not necessarily make it any less serious (Schepens 2005, esp. 159–60). One wonders, furthermore, whether one can turn the presence of this motif into a question of genre or claim that the emotion of love cannot possibly have a place in a work of history. After all, love is a very real emotion that can make even the most powerful men do the craziest things, as Cyrus points out in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* (5.12). Thus, even if Ctesias were to be the only historian to give love a place in historiography, one could equally argue that at least in this respect he was the only one who got it right—regardless of the, to the modern reader, obviously fictional nature of the two love stories found in his fragments: that would at most make him an unreliable historian, which is not the same as a novelist, but that is a problem that will be addressed later.

The next item on the list is the novel-like character development in Ctesias' work. Auberger (1995, 64–5) notes that the Cyrus of Ctesias has nothing in common with the Cyrus of Herodotus, a tragic hero, or with the Cyrus of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*. Rather, he seems to have the attitude of an ordinary condottiere, not of a monarch, and he is quite fickle. Ctesias' Cyrus is a literary construct, and one that may have more in common with characters we meet in the later novels, than with Herodotus' Cyrus and other kings as we meet them in ancient historiography, but he is no more of a literary construct than those others. At the same time, it is theoretically possible that, in the not so royal behaviour of Cyrus, we see something of the complexities of life rather than a completely idealised figure.³⁵ However this may be, there is, again, no incompatibility with the idea of Ctesias being a historian.

Lastly, the novelistic digressions. Auberger (1995, 65–71) claims that Ctesias' work contains stories about many individuals that are developed like novels, or novellas to use the word Llewellyn-Jones (2010, 68–76; cf. Gera 1993, 206–9) prefers, that are mostly autonomous from the main narrative.³⁶ There is one simple question to be asked at the outset: how are we to tell that they are autonomous with the present state of preservation of Ctesias' work?³⁷ Is it not one of the essential characteristics of a fragment that it is autonomous from the larger narrative in which it originally figured? Even when an alleged fragment like the first 28 chapters of Diodorus' second book, contains these stories within a wider narrative, it is still Diodorus' narrative, which can at best be only a very rough summary of the first three books of Ctesias' *Persica*.³⁸ Such a summary does not allow us to know the original context of any of its elements, and all such stories may well have had a particular function within Ctesias' narrative as similar stories do within Herodotus' *Histories*—Llewellyn-Jones in his treatment of Ctesias' novellas does recognise this. Auberger (1995, 67) also makes much of the oracles that occur in these stories, but given the frequency of oracles in Herodotus' *Histories*, those can hardly mean that Ctesias was not writing history. The *peripeteiai*, or sudden reversals, the characters in these stories experience are by no means incompatible with history either.³⁹

The second kind of digressions that Auberger (1995, 71) singles out as a novelistic feature of Ctesias' work, i.e. the so-called scientific digressions, seem to constitute even less of an argument. She states that such geographical or zoological digressions are not preserved by Diodorus or Photius, who were interested in the facts, but by Aelian, Plutarch or Antigonos, which would confirm that they do not belong in a work of history. Diodorus' *Bibliotheca* has more than enough of

such digressions, the one about the geography, flora and fauna of Egypt taking up no fewer than 12 chapters,⁴⁰ and they are to be found in many other ancient historians as well, again for instance in Herodotus, who seems to have included such digressions more often than Ctesias, if we can rely on Photius' comparison (*FGrH* 688 T13). Moreover, Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Pomp.* 3.11) praises Herodotus for this aspect of his work (Priestley 2014, 207–9). This is thus by no means a feature unique to the novel either.⁴¹

Stronk (2007, 45) notes that the Greek word *historia* could also be used to describe a novel, but there is no reason why this should tell us more about Ctesias than about other ancient historians, and in fact I would rather say it does not tell us anything about them at all. It is just a matter of Greek literary terminology being less developed, and less interested in neat categories, than ours.

A further, but obviously in itself not very conclusive argument is to be found in Photius, who also discusses several ancient novels. When he does mention their genre, so to speak, he calls them *δραματικός*, which he only does for novels (*Bibl. cod.* 73, 87, 94 and 166).⁴² Ctesias he calls a *συγγραφεύς*, the normal Greek word for a historian (*LSJ s.v.*). Moreover, whenever he compares the novelists with other authors, he compares them with other novelists: Achilles Tatius with Heliodorus (*cod.* 87), Iamblichus with both Achilles Tatius and Heliodorus (*cod.* 94), Lucius of Patrae with Lucian (*cod.* 129). Ctesias he compares with another historian, namely Herodotus (*cod.* 72 = *FGrH* 688 T13). Again, this argument is not conclusive, but it does give some indication of how Photius saw Ctesias and how he saw the novelists.

Ctesias the Historian

Thus, I see no reason to go further than Marincola's judgement (1997, 22) that the *Persica* is a historical narrative 'that contained much palace intrigue and seems to have frequently shaded into romance'.⁴³ But how frequently and to what extent, we cannot say. It will not do to use the literary characteristics of a work as evidence that it was something different from history at a time when historiography—like any other written work—essentially was a kind of literature. But this is of course the problem: Ctesias seems to have been so unreliable, that considering him a historian would leave a serious blot on the escutcheon of ancient historiography, one that may affect the overall seriousness of the genre and disqualify its use as a source for political history. That Ctesias' works do not seem to fit our views of what

history should be, must not be an invitation to beg the question, however. Assuredly they contain many novelistic features, but most of these are also to be found in other works of ancient historiography, and none of them is incompatible with Ctesias being a historian by ancient standards.⁴⁴ The conclusion that he was a kind of novelist emerges only when we set out to prove that that is what he was with the preconceived idea that he wrote fiction because he would be a problematic historian. There is an interesting historical parallel. In his 1842 essay 'The philosophy of Herodotus', Thomas de Quincy tried to explain Herodotus' reputation by arguing that no one had understood what Herodotus was really trying to do, because of a mistranslation of the word *historia* in Herodotus, which did not mean history but 'inquiry' or 'investigation'. As Evans (1968, 12) has rightly pointed out, this will not do, as *historia* got the meaning history precisely thanks to Herodotus, and we know of no one in the ancient world who thought that he did not write history. Evans (loc. cit.) rightly classifies De Quincy's essay among the 'desperate tactics for defence' of Herodotus.

Ctesias and Ancient Historiographical Polemics

The view of Ctesias as an author of fiction perhaps stems mostly from the testimonia about his work: we have seen that Jacoby (1922, 2046) said he was universally condemned as unreliable by the ancient tradition ('das einstimmige Urteil des Altertums'). This is somewhat exaggerated given that the vast majority of about fifty authors who cite or quote him say nothing about this. Nonetheless, it is clear that Ctesias was often called unreliable (Jacoby collected the evidence under T11), but should we take these judgements at face value, and do they necessarily mean that almost anything Ctesias says is false? I suggest we first turn to Josephus, as we find an excellent ancient introduction to the problem of Greek historiographical polemics in his *Contra Apionem* (1.15–18):

Πὼς οὖν οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλογον τετυφῶσθαι τοὺς Ἕλληνας ὡς μόνους ἐπισταμένους τὰρχαῖα καὶ τὴν ἀλήθειαν περὶ αὐτῶν ἀκριβῶς παραδιδόντας; ἢ τίς οὐ παρ' αὐτῶν ἂν τῶν συγγραφέων μάθοι ῥαδίως, ὅτι μὴδὲν βεβαίως εἰδότες συνέγραψον, ἀλλ' ὡς ἕκαστοι περὶ τῶν πραγμάτων εἰκάζον; τὸ πλεῖον γοῦν διὰ τῶν βιβλίων ἀλλήλους ἐλέγχουσι καὶ τάναντιώτατα περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν λέγειν οὐκ ὀκνοῦσι. Περιεργος δ' ἂν εἴην ἐγὼ τοὺς ἐμοῦ μᾶλλον ἐπισταμένους διδάσκων ὅσα μὲν Ἑλλάνικος Ἀκουσίλαος περὶ τῶν γενεαλογιῶν διαπεφώνηκεν, ὅσα δὲ διορθοῦται τὸν Ἡσίοδον Ἀκουσίλαος, ἢ τίνα τρόπον Ἐφορος μὲν Ἑλλάνικον ἐν τοῖς πλείστοις ψευδόμενον ἐπιδείκνυσιν, Ἐφορον δὲ Τίμαιος καὶ Τίμαιον οἱ μετ' ἐκεῖνον γεγονότες, Ἡρόδοτον δὲ πάντες. ἀλλ' οὐδὲ περὶ τῶν Σικελικῶν τοῖς περὶ Ἀντίοχον καὶ Φίλιππον ἢ Καλλιαν Τίμαιος συμφωνεῖν ἠξίωσεν, οὐδ' αὖ

περὶ τῶν Ἀττικῶν οἱ τὰς Ἀθίδας συγγεγραφότες ἢ περὶ τῶν Ἀργολικῶν οἱ τὰ περὶ Ἄργος ἱστοροῦντες ἀλλήλοις κατηκολουθήκασιν. Καὶ τί δεῖ λέγειν περὶ τῶν κατὰ πόλεις καὶ βραχυτέρων; ὅπου γε περὶ τῆς Περσικῆς στρατείας καὶ τῶν ἐν αὐτῇ πραχθέντων οἱ δοκιμώτατοι διαπεφωνήκασιν, πολλὰ δὲ καὶ Θουκυδίδης ὡς ψευδόμενος ὑπὸ τινων κατηγορεῖται καίτοι δοκῶν ἀκριβεστάτην τὴν καθ' αὐτὸν ἱστορίαν συγγράφειν.

Surely, then, it is absurd that the Greeks should be so conceited as to think themselves the sole possessors of a knowledge of antiquity and the only accurate reporters of its history. Anyone can easily discover from the historians themselves that their writings have no basis of sure knowledge, but merely present the facts as conjectured by individual authors. More often than not they confute each other in their works, not hesitating to give the most contradictory accounts of the same events. It would be superfluous for me to point out to readers better informed than myself what discrepancies there are between Hellanicus and Acusilaus on the genealogies, how often Acusilaus corrects Hesiod, how the mendacity of Hellanicus in most of his statements is exposed by Ephorus, that of Ephorus by Timaeus, that of Timaeus by later writers, and that of Herodotus by everybody. Even on Sicilian history Timaeus did not condescend to agree with Antiochus, Philistus or Callias; there is similar divergence on Attic affairs between the authors of the 'Atthides' and on Argive affairs between the historians of Argos. What need, however, to speak of the histories of individual states and matters of minor importance, when contradictory accounts of the Persian invasion and the events that accompanied it have been given by writers of the first rank? On many points even Thucydides is accused of error by some critics, notwithstanding his reputation for writing the most accurate history of his time.

First of all, Ctesias is not mentioned in this passage, at least not explicitly, and if his account of the Persian Wars is among those Josephus is referring to, then he would even be considered a writer of the first rank—but we have no way of knowing, of course. What is more important is that the example of an author who is apparently considered unreliable by everybody is Herodotus, and that Greek historians constantly disagree with each other and denounce their predecessors as untruthful. Josephus himself, of course, is playing that very game in this passage.⁴⁵ Very much unlike modern academic discourse in which polemic is to be avoided and disagreement is to be expressed politely (needless to say that the reality is often quite different), the ancient Greeks seem to have preferred the procedure of frontal—and not always completely fair—attack.⁴⁶

Herodotus and Thucydides mostly kept their polemics anonymous,⁴⁷ but indeed from Ctesias onwards we regularly see very explicit polemics against named predecessors, not only Herodotus, but also Hellanicus (T8, F16 §62, and D. S. 2.15.1–2). Herodotus is not simply called wrong by Ctesias, but a liar who invents tales. Timaeus was apparently very good at polemics, as he gained the nickname Epitimaïos or 'Censurer' (D. S. 5.1.3; cf. Polybius' description of

Timaeus' practice: 12.26d.3). Plutarch (*Per.* 28) calls Duris usually untruthful, although he often uses him as a source. And in one passage of the *Artaxerxes* (13.3), he says that Ctesias, his main source, tells a manifest lie (λαμπρὸν ἤδη ψεῦσμα). However, two other testimonia from Plutarch appear in a rather different light when one considers the context: in T11d and 11e he is actually saying that, although Ctesias included many incredible tales in his work, in these two instances he surely was reliable.

The most striking aspect of the ancient practice is that all the while proclaiming their superior truthfulness historians often resorted to deformation and misrepresentation of the text of a predecessor to make their case. This is what Ctesias famously does with Herodotus, if we can rely on the evidence of Diodorus (2.15.1–2): both Diodorus' regular practice and his express statement that Ctesias declares that Herodotus is inventing a tale suggest that this is a polemic from Ctesias.⁴⁸ However, the use of glass, Herodotus' allegedly invented tale, is not actually to be found in Herodotus' work. Ctesias completely misrepresents Herodotus' work in order to be able to criticise him (Bigwood 1980, 197; Lenfant 1999, 117–18). Given Ctesias' reputation, few will be surprised. But more or less the same phenomenon is to be observed even in Polybius' lengthy attack against Timaeus in book twelve. All the while Polybius is trying to show that Timaeus only worked on the basis of the books of predecessors and ignored the most important sources, travelling, autopsy and the questioning of eyewitnesses (e.g. 12.27.2–6). In the midst of his polemic against Timaeus, however, he states (12.10.4):

καίτοι διότι τοῦτ' ἰδίον ἐστὶ Τιμαίου καὶ ταύτῃ παρημίλληται τοὺς ἄλλους συγγραφέας καὶ καθόλου τῇδὲ πῃ <τέτευχε> τῆς ἀποδοχῆς—λέγω δὲ κατὰ τὴν ἐν τοῖς χρόνοις καὶ ταῖς ἀναγραφαῖς ἐπίφασιν τῆς ἀκριβείας καὶ τὴν περὶ τοῦτο τὸ μέρος ἐπιμέλειαν—δοκῶ, πάντες γινώσκομεν.

And yet Timaios's special boast, the thing in which he outvies other authors and which is the main cause of the reputation he enjoys, is, as I suppose we all know, his display of accuracy in the matter of dates and public records, and the care he devotes to such matters.

Polybius uses Timaeus' fame in this respect to build an argument that, because Timaeus does not provide all details about a particular source, he was probably lying in that instance because he usually did provide such details. Apparently he did not notice that this argument undermined part of his general case against Timaeus. And there is more, so that Baron (2009, 14) can aptly summarise it as follows: 'Polybios describes Timaios as a man obsessed with citing sources of information, with confirming their reliability, with finding new

inscriptional evidence, with comparing and reconciling conflicting data'. Thus, Polybius' general criticism of Timaeus gravely misrepresents the latter's work, and as Baron (2009) has shown, scholars have often not taken note of this in their evaluations of Timaeus.

The situation is rather paradoxical. Although these ancient polemics have as their primary purpose to prove the ability of the criticising author and to establish his reputation as a great historian, sometimes even misrepresenting the other author's work, the central role of truth in these polemics clearly reveals that truth was central to ancient historiography: not to tell the truth was the historian's worst crime, always telling the truth being his main task (cf. e.g. Plb. 2.56.11–12 and 12.11.8; Cic., *de Orat.* 2.62; Luc., *Hist. conscr.* 39).⁴⁹ Polybius is clearly desperate to present himself as a more truthful historian than Timaeus.

By now it should be clear that, as Marincola (1997, 217) put it, 'nearly every ancient historian seeks to portray himself as a lonely seeker of truth, as the only one who has somehow understood the historian's proper task, while his predecessors (as he will frequently remind us) failed in the effort'. Greek historians saw each other as competitors and in order to surpass their predecessors they felt the need to deprecate them. This is why the strongest competitors—the most popular or most widely read ones—often receive the most criticism (Lenfant 1999, 119). This surely explains Ctesias' reputation. Because he is cited very often indeed, he is also called a liar very often. In fact many of the ancient works that cite Ctesias actually use him as a reliable source on Near Eastern history.⁵⁰

It is interesting to compare Ctesias' reputation with that of Herodotus. Ctesias is far from the only one to call Herodotus untruthful:⁵¹ as Lenfant has shown, they enjoyed a very similar reputation in antiquity.⁵² Indeed, Photius (*Bibl. cod.* 60) writes that Herodotus,

κέχρηται δὲ μυθολογίαις καὶ παρεκβάσειι πολλαῖς, δι' ὧν αὐτῷ ἢ κατὰ διάνοιαν γλυκύτης διαρρεῖ, εἰ καὶ πρὸς τὴν τῆς ἱστορίας κατάληψιν καὶ τὸν οἰκεῖον αὐτῆς καὶ κατάλληλον τύπον ἐνίστε ταῦτα ἐπισκοτεῖ, οὐκ ἐθελοῦσης τῆς ἀληθείας μύθοις αὐτῆς ἀμαυροῦσθαι τὴν ἀκρίβειαν, οὐδὲ πλέον τοῦ προσήκοντος ἀποπλανᾶσθαι ταῖς παρεκβάσειν.

is fond of mythology and digressions, pervaded by charming sentiments, which, however, sometimes obscure the due appreciation of history and its correct and proper character. Truth does not allow her accuracy to be impaired by fables or excessive digressions from the subject.

Likewise, Diodorus (1.69.7) polemicises against Herodotus' account of Egypt in the following terms:

ὅσα μὲν οὖν Ἡρόδοτος καὶ τινες τῶν τὰς Αἰγυπτίων πράξεις συνταξαμένων ἐσχεδιάκασιν, ἐκουσίως προκρίναντες τῆς ἀληθείας τὸ παραδοξολογεῖν καὶ μύθους πλάττειν ψυχαγωγίας ἕνεκα, παρήσομεν, αὐτὰ δὲ τὰ παρὰ τοῖς ἱερεῦσι τοῖς κατ' Αἴγυπτον ἐν ταῖς ἀναγραφαῖς γεγραμμένα φιλοτίμως ἐξητακότες ἐκθυσόμεθα.

Now as for the stories invented by Herodotus and certain writers on Egyptian affairs, who deliberately preferred to the truth the telling of marvellous tales and the invention of myths for the delectation of their readers, these we shall omit, and we shall set forth only what appears in the written records of the priests of Egypt and has passed our careful scrutiny.

To find such a statement in Diodorus' first book, which—like many other parts of the *Bibliotheca*—is replete with such stories, may seem strange to us, but he is simply presenting himself as 'a lonely seeker of truth', just like Ctesias and all the others.

Cicero (*Leg.* 1.5, quoted above; cf. *Div.* 2.116) also lists Herodotus, along with Theopompus, as historians who include in their works innumerable fabulous tales that do not belong in history. Strabo, who commends Theopompus for acknowledging the mythical element in his work,⁵³ twice places Herodotus and Ctesias side by side as reporters of implausible myths:

1.2.35 (T11b): φαίνεται γὰρ εὐθὺς ὅτι μύθους παραπλέκουσιν ἐκόντες οὐκ ἀγνοίᾳ τῶν ὄντων, ἀλλὰ πλάσει τῶν ἀδυνάτων τερατείας καὶ τέρψεως χάριν. δοκοῦσι δὲ κατ' ἀγνοίαν, ὅτι μάλιστα καὶ πιθανῶς τὰ τοιαῦτα μυθεύουσι περὶ τῶν ἀδῆλων καὶ τῶν ἀγνοουμένων. Θεόπομπος δὲ ἐξομολογεῖται φήσας ὅτι καὶ μύθους ἐν ταῖς ἱστορίαις ἐρεῖ κρεῖττον ἢ ὡς Ἡρόδοτος καὶ Κτησίας καὶ Ἑλλάνικος καὶ οἱ τὰ Ἰνδικὰ συγγράψαντες.

For it is self-evident that they are weaving in myths intentionally, not through ignorance of the facts, but through an intentional invention of the impossible, to gratify the taste for the marvelous and the entertaining, but they give the impression of doing this through ignorance, because by preference and with an air of plausibility they tell such tales about the unfamiliar and the unknown. Theopompus expressly acknowledges the practice when he says that he intends to narrate myths too in his history—a better way than that of Herodotus, Ctesias, Hellanicus, and the authors of the histories of India. (trans. Jones, LCL)

11.6.3 (T11a): ῥᾶιον δ' ἂν τις Ἡσιόδῳ καὶ Ὀμήρῳ πιστεύσειεν ἥρωολογοῦσι καὶ τοῖς τραγικοῖς ποιηταῖς ἢ Κτησίᾳ τε καὶ Ἡροδότῳ καὶ Ἑλλανίκῳ καὶ ἄλλοις τοιοῦτοις. (ἐν ἱστορίᾳς σχήματι)

One would more readily believe Hesiod and Homer with their heroic tales and the tragic poets than Ctesias, Herodotus, Hellanicus, and other such writers.

Lucian, too, in his *True Histories* (2.31 = T11hβ) presents both Ctesias

καὶ μεγίστας ἀπασῶν τιμωρίας ὑπέμενον οἱ ψευσάμενοί τι παρὰ τὸν βίον
καὶ οἱ μὴ τὰ ἀληθῆ συγγραφότες, ἐν οἷς καὶ Κτησίας ὁ Κνίδιος ἦν καὶ
Ἡρόδοτος καὶ ἄλλοι πολλοί.

And the greatest punishments of all fell on those who had ever in their lives told
lies and historians who had not told the truth, among whom were Ctesias of
Cnidus, Herodotus, and many others.

It seems difficult simply to use these testimonia about Ctesias as
evidence for his complete unreliability, unless we are willing to accept
that ancient historians preferred to rely on sources they deemed
generally unreliable: they all used Ctesias as a reliable source on the
East. We have to see this in its rhetorical context.

The Picture Provided by the Fragments

Of course, there is also the problem of the contents of the fragments.
In a very interesting article entitled ‘Peut-on se fier aux “fragments”
des historiens? L’exemple des citations d’Hérodote’, Lenfant has
compared the treatment of Ctesias and Herodotus in those authors
who cite or quote both. The first of these is Aristotle, and he gives a
very similar image of the two. What we would know from Aristotle
about Herodotus, is that he talks about the plover who picks leeches
from the crocodile’s throat, about the black semen of Ethiopians and
about procreation among fish. Aristotle deems Herodotus statement
about the latter two matters stupid (Lenfant 1999, 107–8). Strabo, as
we have seen, calls both Herodotus and Ctesias unreliable, but mostly
he cites Herodotus without criticising him, only doing so in four out of
thirty instances. Most significantly, in two of those, Herodotus is
criticised for something he has not actually said. The image of
Herodotus we get from the quotations by Strabo, is that he loves
stereotypical formulas (four times Egypt is called a gift of the Nile),
and the fact that a third of the quotations concern rivers, would
definitely have led scholars to argue that Herodotus had a particular
interest in rivers, had his work been lost. Strabo cites several frivolous
details from Herodotus, comparable to the ones he cites from Ctesias.
We get a rather weird image of both authors, and none of the
quotations reveals anything of their original context (Lenfant 1999,
108–10). What is interesting in the ‘fragments’ of Herodotus from
Diodorus’ *Bibliotheca* is that, on two out of eight occasions, Diodorus
claims that Herodotus made a particular statement as a certainty
while Herodotus actually only mentions it as a hypothesis. The
difference obviously is quite important. As we have seen, on some

occasions he misrepresents Herodotus in order to criticise him; that these probably go back to Ctesias does not affect the image we would get of Herodotus had his work been lost. Strikingly, from Diodorus we would get a more positive image of Ctesias, as a man who consulted archives, regularly gave precise numbers and corrected Herodotus (Lenfant 1999, 116–18). Thus, the fragments as well as the testimonia show the extent to which Ctesias and Herodotus resemble each other.

And indeed, the image we get of the *Persica* from the totality of its fragments depends for a large part on interpretation. Jacoby's procedure is interesting. He assumes that Ctesias is wholly unreliable, hardly used any actual sources, that his work cannot really be called a history, and that Ctesias could just as well have written it without having gone to Persia (Jacoby 1922, 2041–59). Subsequently he discusses several fragments that may reflect actual oriental traditions or facts, but each time Jacoby rejects the possibility of the actual use of oriental sources because he believes these are coincidences as Ctesias simply invented everything.⁵⁵ This may be true in isolated cases, but the unprejudiced cumulative picture would rather suggest that Ctesias actually relied on oriental traditions. For the *Indica* Jacoby (1922, 2037–9) was more forgiving. The *Indica* he could see in the tradition of typical Greek ethnography about remote countries; he knew that fragments would rather report the most fabulous elements, that Ctesias never claimed to have been in India himself, and that Ctesias made the important distinction between what he had seen with his own eyes, and what he had heard from others. But indeed, most of the testimonia about Ctesias' unreliability concern precisely the *Indica*.⁵⁶

In the *Persica* Ctesias claims to have obtained information from archives, to have seen many things himself and to have talked to eyewitnesses (D. S. 2.22.5 and 32.4; Plu., *Art.* 18; Phot., *Bibl. cod.* 72, 44a30). Even Stronk (2007, 38–9) in his discussion of Ctesias as a poet argues that there were Persian archives—their very existence has been doubted—and that Ctesias could have obtained information preserved in these archives. Furthermore, it has now been shown that not all cases where Ctesias was thought to distort Herodotus randomly, actually are such distortions.⁵⁷ Also, in several cases Ctesias is in agreement with cuneiform sources on issues where Herodotus disagrees with them (Lenfant 1996, 360–61). It is likewise not impossible that, even in some of the cases where Herodotus was right and Ctesias wrong, the latter still relied on oriental sources as rival versions of events will have circulated in the Persian Empire too. Some of the literary motifs found in his work are likely to be oriental (Boncquet 1987, *passim*; Lenfant 1996, 367; Dalley 2003, 182).⁵⁸ With

regard to Photius' summary, it seems that it focuses specifically on the disagreements between Ctesias and Herodotus, and it is as possible that he gives a very complete list as that he only offers a small selection or anything in between these extremes. That we cannot know (but see Bichler 2011, 25).

Ctesias' focus on the court, women, eunuchs and intrigues might not quite accord with what the majority of modern historians find relevant and important, but then on that matter we would not even agree with many historians from a hundred years ago, when most would still have fully agreed with Gibbon's claim (1841, 134) that '[w]ars and the administration of public affairs are the principal subjects of history'. Furthermore, such court intrigue may well have been what struck Ctesias most as an outsider living at the Persian court, and his focus on that court may well mean that much of his work may indeed be based on what he saw himself or heard from eyewitnesses.⁵⁹

All of this is not to say that the traditional image of Ctesias' reliability is completely wrong, but it does seem rather exaggerated,⁶⁰ partly on the basis of a misunderstanding of the polemical rhetoric of Greek historiography. All in all, Ctesias appears very much as a Herodotean historian, albeit probably of lesser quality, but the difference seems to be one of degree rather than of kind.

Making Sense of Ctesias' Place in Ancient Historiography

Even if Ctesias can be seen as a very Herodotean historian in so many different ways, it remains difficult to make complete sense of his place in the ancient historiographical tradition.⁶¹ Some would claim that the literary nature of ancient historiography simply granted historians the freedom to invent,⁶² though that at any rate is not how historians in antiquity seem to have perceived their task.⁶³ That telling the truth, in the sense of what actually happened, was the main aim of historians in the ancient world seems clear enough (cf. *supra* on polemics about truth).

At any rate, to put the problem in terms of Ctesias' reliability as a source for the history of the ancient Near East,⁶⁴ seems not quite the right way to pose the question. It bears emphasis that Ctesias' value as a source for political history is only relevant by default: the ancient historians are only used as sources for the events they describe because far too little primary evidence has been preserved.⁶⁵ Unless

one has a very relativistic definition of truth, historians quite simply cannot write the truth, but only what they believe to be truth; when they do so under the obligation of the evidence, they are in my view likely to report actual past events and thus to achieve truth, although this will always have to be decided—or perhaps rather, debated—on a case-by-case basis and there is of course no further means of control apart from the evidence itself.⁶⁶ At any rate, since belief, evidence and interpretational schemes are to a greater or lesser extent culturally contingent—all the more so in a diachronic perspective—and differ from person to person as well, we need not really be surprised at Ctesias deviating so much from what we would expect in a historical account of the ancient Near East. If Ctesias interpreted court intrigue as the essence of Persian history, then that is what we shall find in his *Persica*.⁶⁷ Gehrke's (1994; 2014) concept of intentional history is highly relevant here: if history defines people's identity while that identity is also understood in opposition to a barbarian other, the history of that other is likely to be written in a most peculiar way. Furthermore, the traditions of the people about whom Ctesias was writing will likewise have been strongly coloured by intentional history. The process of stereotyping in Greek *Persica* literature has recently been documented in great detail by Madreiter (2012), and in combination with simplifications through selection and presentation in authors like Diodorus, the fragments of Ctesias offer stereotyping in the second degree.

Most importantly, the question is what kind of truth the historian is looking for. Major characteristics of ancient historiography, as Moles (1993) has argued convincingly, are its closeness to poetry and a concern for universal truth as well as, or sometimes even more than, for specific truths: in its extreme forms this may likewise be very conducive of stereotyping. Both aspects are strongly interrelated, not only because the authors seem to have had a poetic rather than a modern scientific worldview, but also because according to certain ancient views, most famously expressed by Aristotle (*Po.* 1451b), poetry's ability to focus mostly on universal truth made it more serious and more philosophical than history.⁶⁸ Thus, it would seem that ancient historians tended to disagree with such views on history as Aristotle's and at least implicitly set out to disprove it. This obviously makes it difficult for modern historians to understand, let alone approve of, the ancient practice, as the current Western worldview is strongly scientific, and our idea of history is primarily concerned with the specificity of each event. For this reason it has been argued that history cannot be philosophical,⁶⁹ though the tension is obviously reflected in the debate over whether history is or

should be a social science. Nevertheless, there is no point in trying to force ancient historiography into a mould that does not fit and to try to understand it on the basis of our views of history.

Moles' conclusions of the literary nature and the partially poetic shape of history in the ancient world, as well as its quest for universal truths, obviously put Ctesias' work in a different light, though even then the fragmentary nature of the work complicates matters. At any rate, there is no reason to see whatever didactic or universalising perspective Ctesias may have had as a reason for identifying Ctesias as some sort of poet rather than as a historian.⁷⁰ It is not impossible that Ctesias included something along the lines of Herodotus' famous statement that he reported what he had heard without necessarily believing it all. Or he may at least have expressed doubts or even disbelief about what he reported in some specific instances, and as we have seen fragments often remove the doubts an author may express about the stories he is reporting.⁷¹ Another possibility is that Ctesias simply was a very credulous man. However, he cannot possibly have believed everything he reported in his *Indica*, and credulity cannot explain his mistakenly contradicting Herodotus—although, again, we obviously cannot rule out the possibility that he actually had sources for this. As to the marvels in the *Indica*, it should be noted that such marvellous folktales were only normal in travel literature well into the early modern period (Pritchett 1993, 266–90 and specifically 271–4 on Ctesias).

Perhaps the problem was that completeness in the sense of including even the very early times, was more important to him than pure truth. This was the case for Diodorus (1.3; 4.1), for instance, in his mythological books, but he does indicate the problem of the unreliability of such stories himself (4.1.1, 4.8.3–4; cf. 1.2.2 and Hau, this volume).⁷² And when it comes to illustrating general truths, such stories obviously can contribute just as much. Polemic and rhetoric played their role, especially in the depreciation of Herodotus, but here Ctesias very much was part of the tradition. Perhaps the answer is simply that Ctesias was a bad historian,⁷³ or one too much concerned with his own glory,⁷⁴ but a historian he certainly was and, however incomplete the present attempt may remain, this point needs to be explained rather than explained away.⁷⁵

Notes

- 1 The standard edition of Ctesias is now Lenfant (2004). Unless stated otherwise, translations of testimonia and fragments of Ctesias are Robson's (from Llewellyn-Jones and Robson 2010); those of other texts are from the Loeb

- 2 Jacoby (1922, esp. 2046). It seems worth pointing out from the outset that Herodotus presents us with highly similar issues: see below, for his reputation of untrustworthiness in antiquity, and cf. e.g. Boedeker (2000, 99): 'It is appropriate, then, for us to consider Herodotus an early practitioner of what would be defined as *historia* As soon as we grant all this, however, a serious problem arises, for a great deal of material simply cannot be accurate'.
- 3 E.g. Bigwood (1978, 43–4): 'He claims to be a historian and no writer of romance, but we may well doubt that he had any enthusiasm at all for the labour that genuine historical inquiry might involve'; Hägg (1983, 114): 'historical facts fight a losing battle with the desire to shock, move excite and dazzle'; Sancisi-Weerdenburg (1987, 43): 'Ktesias is probably at best considered as an unskilled informant, who has preserved more of the literary tradition than of the factual history of Persia'; Momigliano (1990, 10): 'he seems to have been more concerned with sensationalism than with truth'; Gera (1993, 200): 'The ancients testify—and the fragments themselves indicate—that Ctesias' history was picturesque and sensational, filled with dramatic incredible tales'; Schmitt (1993): 'He seems to have lacked a genuine interest in history, and the omissions and misinformation in his account reflect an inability to select data of historical relevance and a lack of sensitivity to motivations and causality'; Lenfant (2004, cxxiii): 'un piètre historien'; Asheri et al. (2007, 51): 'second to none in deceit and unreliability'; Knippschild (2010, 460): 'The general impression it makes is that of a collection of stories focusing on exotic and sensational events and people, aiming at amazement and one-upmanship rather than veracity and unity of thought'; Bichler (2011, 24): 'Ktesias muss notwendigerweise als ein "Historiker", der in einem so erheblichen Umfang naiv auf Klatsch und Tratsch und allerlei absurd-abenteuerliche Geschichten vertraute, eine eher armselige Figur machen'; Scardino (2014, 620): 'mit seiner pseudo-historischen, aber dramatisch effektvollen Darstellungsweise'.
- 4 Momigliano (1990, 10): 'Ctesias is more of a novelist than a historian'; Auberger (1995, 57): 'Depuis l'antiquité jusqu'à nos jours les critiques se succèdent, toutes plus acerbes et méprisantes les unes que les autres, refusant de voir en lui un historien digne de ce nom, ce que nous admettons volontiers'; Goold (1995, 11): 'the historical romancer Ctesias'; Högemann (1999, 874): 'Historiker dem lit(erarischen) Genre, Romanschriftsteller modernen Kriterien nach'; Bichler (2004, 504): 'I do not consider Ctesias to be an author who fits into the usual categories of historical writing. He should be neither regarded as a liar nor be defended for his reliability'; Morgan (2007, 560): 'Despite a developed rhetoric of authority and self-justification, it is clear that Ctesias was more interested in thrilling stories of love and intrigue, than in historical fact as we might conceive it, and actually foreshadowed much of the thematic repertoire of the Greek novel itself'; Llewellyn-Jones (2010, 81): 'a poet-cum-novelist working within the framework of history'. Sorek (2012, 51): 'probably the first historical novel'. See Madreiter (2012, 119–20) for further examples.
- 5 '[D]ie *Persika* . . . (wenigstens in Teilen) als historiographische Metafiktion zu verstehen, gibt dem Werk jenen Wert zurück, den man ihm nimmt, will man es als Historiographie *stricto sensu* lesen'. Wiesehöfer (2013, 139 n. 47)—for reasons already hinted at by Madreiter herself—rejects the label historiographic metafiction as being too postmodern to be applicable to antiquity, but finds 'Madreiter's way of reconciling *res factae* and *res fictae* . . . quite convincing'.
- 6 Wiesehöfer (2013, 137–40): 'it is really "indefinable", or at least it contains a mixture of different genres'.

- 7 See e.g. Marincola (1997, 12–19) for the understanding of genre in terms of tradition. Cf. Hau (2014).
- 8 I thus agree in argument and conclusion with Lenfant (2009, 316 n. 2; see also 1996; 1999; 2004).
- 9 Cf. e.g. Phillips (2013, XII, 5, 59 and 236).
- 10 E.g. Huizinga (1936, 9), whose definition of history as ‘the intellectual form in which a civilization renders account to itself of its past’ aimed at being valid for historians as diverse as Herodotus, Gregory of Tours, Joinville, Villani, Michelet and Macaulay.
- 11 For the early development of Greek prose genres, see Pelling (2007, 76–88). Specifically for historiography, see e.g. Hornblower (1991, 58–9); Pelling (1999, 325–35, esp. 331 on Ctesias); Boedeker (2000); Darbo-Peschanski (2007); Grethlein (2010, 149–280); Gehrke (2014, 65–85). See also e.g. Fornara (1983, 1–4 and *passim*), Marincola (1999), Nicolai (2007, 17–19) and Kraus (2013, 417–25) for further discussions of genre problems in ancient historiography.
- 12 On the early development of the concept of history, a label that does not seem to be attested before Aristotle, see Hornblower (1987, 6–12); Pelling (1999, 331). At any rate, though, Aristotle must have expected his audience to understand what he meant.
- 13 Photius in T8 reports these methodological claims immediately after the criticism of Herodotus. I would rather draw the opposite conclusion from this than Whitmarsh (2013, 61), who suggests that ‘it seems at the very least probable that he was attempting to artifice a new kind of history, which was stronger on narrative and romance than on source criticism’. If Photius more or less preserves the original context, it rather seems that Ctesias was claiming to be stronger on source criticism than Herodotus (cf. Momigliano 1990, 18). It has rightly been pointed out that poets and novelists often claim authority too, sometimes even in the same ways as historians (Holzberg 1993, 81; Stronk 2007, 49–50). However, such authors as Dictys of Crete and Dares Phrygius wrote rather in opposition to Homer. Ctesias’ combination of such claims of authority with opposition to Herodotus suggests that he placed himself in the historical tradition; cf. Schmitt 1993, 444 (*contra* Stronk 2007, 49).
- 14 Wiesehöfer (2013, 138) seems to interpret these passages in the same way. He also quotes T12, 13 and T14a as evidence for his view that ‘already in Antiquity there was argument as to the correct definition of a historian and a poet, and the assigning of Ctesias’ work to a particular genre was felt to be problematic’.
- 15 Fornara (1983, 120–30); Walbank (1990); Moles (1993, 102): ‘even Thucydides hints that his readers can obtain something of that sort of thing from him’. See also Lateiner (1977b, 43), who notes that the παθητικά and the ἀπροσδόκητα of Photius’ judgement on Ctesias are the typical sources of historiographical pleasure in Hellenistic historians, but one may wonder whether such a view was really limited to the Hellenistic period; the *pathos* surely is to be found in Thucydides too, as Lateiner himself shows.
- 16 Cicero even considers entertainment an essential aspect of historiography: see *Ad fam.* 5.12.4.
- 17 Cf. Priestley (2014, 210): ‘The purpose of his comment on Herodotus and Theopompus is not to suggest that they are liars, but instead to demonstrate that even among writers of history, with its different rules, there are still some who have included *fabulae*’.
- 18 Stronk (2007, 46–7; 2011, 393–4) also concludes that this must mean that

Ctesias had the didactic purpose to illustrate a particular universal, and then goes on to speculate about what that universal may have been, but that need not detain us here; it does show very well, I think, how Stronk's method consists for a large part of begging the question. Aristotle's views on history will prove relevant later on, but in a rather different way than envisaged by Stronk: see below, section entitled, 'Making Sense of Ctesias' Place in Ancient Historiography'.

- 19 Cf. Radt (2001), who in a paper entitled 'The importance of the context', begins with the following remark: 'the title of my lecture is of course a truism'. Apparently, though, the point still deserves emphasis, as is also shown by the examples he discusses (esp. 353–61).
- 20 For a more detailed analysis of this passage, see Otto (2009, 81–3).
- 21 Cf. Lateiner (1977a, 101): 'The human element, the chance to present a drama with sudden peripety, interests our historian, who does not need to become asocial or disengaged to remain truthful and accurate. Both the herald and the corpses have contributed to Thucydides' story'. See also Lateiner (1977b, 47–50), Stahl (2003, 133–6). On Thucydides and tragedy, see Macleod (1983); Moles (1993, 112–13).
- 22 Cf. D. H., *Th.* 15 and *Pomp.* 3; *Plu.*, *Art.* 8.1 and *Mor.* 347a. See the discussions of Schepens (1975), Walker (1993); in general also Otto (2009, 31–134). Cf. also Verdin (1990, 8) on the relationship between *enargeia* and truth, and Wiater, this volume.
- 23 See e.g. Woodman (1988, 1–4), Moles (1993, 91–8), Boedeker (2000, 103 with further references in n. 36), Pelling (2006) and Marincola (2006) on the influence of poetry on Herodotus' work. Verdin (1977, 54–65) deals with his critical attitude towards poetry.
- 24 De Jonge (2008, 364) also relates Demetrius' assessment of Ctesias to these ideas.
- 25 Pownall (2010) in her commentary on Douris T11 interprets the passage as criticism of 'the lack of style exhibited in historical works of wide scope', but it is clear that Himerius' point is that as a storyteller Hermogenes, the proconsul of Greece who is being praised in this oration, surpasses even the historians most skilled in this aspect of their craft: see Baron (2016, 62–4).
- 26 As Priestley (2014, 216) notes, it is not insignificant that, while being associated with Homer, Herodotus is also explicitly classified as a historian. In the context of an encomium on his native city, however, the reference to Herodotus is obviously to be taken positively, so that I cannot agree with her tentative suggestion that, 'in equating Herodotus to Homer, the author of the Salmacis Inscription anticipated that a connection which might be made between the two was their common reputation for lies' (216–17). On the later associations of Herodotus and Homer, see Moles (1993, 93–4), Pelling (2006, esp. 77–9), and most recently and in great detail Priestley (2014, 187–220).
- 27 Quint., *Inst.* 10.1.31: *est enim proxima poetis et quodammodo carmen solutum, et scribitur ad narrandum non ad probandum, totumque opus non ad actum rei pugnamque praesentem, sed ad memoriam posteritatis et ingenii famam componitur.* ('History is very close to the poets. In a sense it is a prose poem, and it is written to tell a story, not to prove a point. Moreover, it is wholly designed not for practical effect and present conflicts, but to preserve a memory for future generations and for the glory of its author's talents.') See also Woodman (1988, 100).
- 28 See especially Auberger (1995), Llewellyn-Jones (2010, 68–76). Cf. *supra*, n. 4.

- 29 Hägg (1983, 111–14); Holzberg (1993); cf. Tilg (2010, 9–14 and *passim*), for a sustained argument for the novel's invention by a single author in a sudden creative act rather than a process of generic evolution. That obviously does not mean there was no influence at all: as Whitmarsh (2013, 22) notes, 'the influence on the later novels is arguably direct'.
- 30 Holzberg (1993); Auberger (1995). It should be noted, though, that Holzberg sharply distinguishes Ctesias' history from the actual genre of the novel.
- 31 See Gera (1993, 207–8) for an exploration of the possibilities. Once more Ctesias appears close to Herodotus: cf. Fornara (1983, 166). Wacholder (1962, 68–9), however, claims that not Ctesias himself but the cover text author Nicolaus is responsible for this aspect of Ctesias' fragments; cf. also Toher (2009, 74), who however, does not consider the—admittedly purely hypothetical—possibility that Nicolaus' dialogue between Croesus and his son might go back to Ctesias.
- 32 For the simple style as a novelistic feature, see Holzberg (1993, 83–4).
- 33 Hägg (1983, 17 and 87–90); Auberger (1995, 57 n. 4); Llewellyn-Jones (2010, 68–9). There is, of course, the problem of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*: Zimmermann (2009, 98–103). Yet it seems to me that, unlike perhaps for the generally agreed ancient novels, precisely in the case of the *Cyropaedia*, Zimmermann's (2009, 95) approach of working retrospectively from the definition of the modern genre of the historical novel is particularly hazardous; cf. Whitmarsh (2008a, 2–3) for crucial differences. Also, the *Ninus Romance*, the oldest attested novel, which is dated to c. 100 BC, may only be the *terminus ante quem* for the birth of the novel. For the notorious difficulty of defining the genre of the ancient novel, see further e.g. Bowie (1999, 39–45); Swain (1999a, 3–12); Whitmarsh (2008a); Goldhill (2008); Morales (2009).
- 34 Hdt. 9.113: κατὰ μὲν τὸν ἔρωτα τὸν Ξέρξῳ καὶ τὸν Μασίστῳ θάνατον τοσαῦτα ἐγένετο. I would like to thank the anonymous reader for drawing my attention to this episode.
- 35 Mossman (2010, 148), however, argues that Ctesias describes types, not characters. Cf. also below on stereotyping.
- 36 In general it seems that Auberger rather too easily forgets to heed her own warnings about working with fragmentary texts. On the problems with the use of the word novella, see De Jong (2002, 257–8).
- 37 In fact, Auberger (1995, 65) asks the question herself: 'Comment juger une œuvre et la part des digressions en elle quand on ne dispose plus que de quelques fragments ramassés et modifiés par des intermédiaires?' However, she does not do much with it, apart from this warning in the end of her analysis (71): 'gageons que, si nous avions le texte d'origine, nous aurions affaire à des épisodes plus homogènes et mieux structurés'.
- 38 Furthermore, one has to take into account the—perhaps remote but not in itself unlikely—possibility that Diodorus did not even use Ctesias directly: Bigwood (1980, 196 n. 5); cf. Parker (2009, 43–7).
- 39 Cicero (*Ad fam.* 5.12.4) claimed that they are essential for the historian: *nil est enim aptius ad delectationem lectoris quam temporum varietates fortunaeque vicissitudines* ('nothing is more suitable to the delight of the reader than changing times and reverses of fortune').
- 40 1.32–41. See further e.g. 1.6–8 (the origins of the universe and of life), 2.7–10 (the construction and topography of Babylon) and 11–12 (the geography of Mesopotamia), 2.29–31 (Chaldaean astronomy), 2.35–7 (geography, flora and

fauna of India), 2.48.6–54.7 (geography, flora and fauna of Arabia, ending with the interesting conclusion, *περὶ μὲν οὖν τῆς Ἀραβίας καὶ τῶν ἐν αὐτῇ φυομένων εἰ καὶ πεπλαονάκαμεν, ἀλλ' οὖν πολλὰ τοῖς φιλαναγνωστοῦσι πρὸς φιληκοῖαν ἀπηγγέλκαμεν* [‘With regard, then, to Arabia and the products of that land, even if we have written at too great length, we have at any rate reported many things to delight lovers of reading’]), 3.12–14 (the Egyptian goldmines), 3.50–51 (geography of Libya), 5.23 (amber), 12.58.2–7 (the causes of the plague in Athens, with 58.2: ἐπιζητούσης δὲ τῆς ἱστορίας τὴν τῆς περὶ τὴν νόσον δεινότητος αἰτίαν, ἀναγκαῖόν ἐστιν ἐκθέσθαι ταῦτα [‘And since history seeks to ascertain the cause of the malignancy of this disease, it is our duty to explain these matters’]), 13.82 (the buildings at Acragas), 19.98–9 (the Dead Sea and its asphalt, partially a repetition from 2.48.6–9). 2.7–10, 11–12 and 29–31 are most likely taken from Ctesias. The validity of the point about Photius does not seem to be any greater, cf. e.g. Meyer (2011).

- 41 Cf. *FGrH* 115 T31 for the enormous amount of digressions in Theopompus’ *Philippica*, and in general also Quint. 10.1.33: ‘Licet tamen nobis in digressionibus uti vel historico nonnumquam nitore, . . .’ (‘Nevertheless, we can sometimes use even the elegance of the historian in digressions, . . .’).
- 42 Plutarch’s claim (*Art.* 6.9 = T11e) that Ctesias’ narrative ‘often deviates from the truth and veers towards the legendary and the dramatic’ (πολλάκις . . . πρὸς τὸ μυθῶδες καὶ δραματικὸν ἐκτρέπόμενος τῆς ἀληθείας) is not, of course, an indication of genre, but simply the description of a feature of the narrative, *pace* Madreiter (2012, 118).
- 43 Highly interesting in this respect is the following observation by Lenfant (2004, cxxxiii–cxxxiv): “‘They are court-novels, of palace-plots; of cruel punishments and even crueller vengeance, of faithful viziers and treachery, of harem intrigue and bedroom scenes, where women have equal power with men to decide history’. Telles sont, selon O. Murray, les caractéristiques des récits perses . . . d’Hérodote’.
- 44 Cf. Whitmarsh (2013, 23).
- 45 See Cohen (1988, 5): ‘The Against Apion’s denunciations of bias, ignorance, invention, sloppy documentation, and rhetorical display cannot be paralleled in the Hebrew Bible but are readily paralleled in Greek historiography, . . . Josephus attacks the Greeks with their own weapons’.
- 46 Perrin (1897); Marincola (1997, 225–36).
- 47 Exceptions are Hdt. 2.143 against Hecataeus (though not on a historiographical issue) and Th. 1.97.2 against Hellanicus. See Lateiner (1989, 94–5 and 211); Hornblower (1996, 123); Boedeker (2000, 103–8); cf. also Verdin (1977).
- 48 This is not the place to go into the debate about Diodorus and his sources, but it seems to me that the traditional view still has a stronger basis than the claim that Diodorus himself systematically compared sources: see Hau (2009); Parker (2009).
- 49 Woodman (1988, esp. 80–83) has argued that Cicero is not referring to the central role of truth for the historian, but his argument has been convincingly refuted by Leeman (1989).
- 50 Schmitt (1993); Stronk (2007, 40).
- 51 Cf. Asheri et al. (2007, 51–2): ‘Herodotus became the “father of lies” long before becoming the “father of history”. No other ancient historian was censured with such violence . . .’ On Herodotus’ reputation in this respect, see

also Momigliano (1966) and Evans (1968).

- 52 Lenfant (1996, 349–51; 1999, 106–7): ‘Contrairement à l’appréciation moderne, qui oppose un Hérodote généralement véridique à un Ctésias le plus souvent “menteur”, la tradition antique les a le plus souvent jugés équivalents’.
- 53 See Biraschi (1996). Strabo is not saying that Herodotus and Ctesias (and Hellenicus) are not historians, but that among historians Theopompus had a greater sensitivity to the problem raised by the inclusion of myths in a truthful historical account than the others.
- 54 On this passage, see Tamiolaki (2013, esp. 151): ‘Cette présentation reflète évidemment une réalité contemporaine sur la réception d’Hérodote: l’historien avait fini par être assimilé avec Ctésias’. Cf. Luc., *Philops.* 2 (= T11hγ). Given the association with Herodotus, Lucian’s depiction of Ctesias cannot simply be taken as an indication that he was not considered as a historian, *pace* Madreiter (2012, 118).
- 55 See e.g. Jacoby (1922, 2051) on Wilcken’s suggestion that the description of Ninus’ campaigns is inspired by the accounts of their campaigns the Assyrian kings left to posterity, against which Jacoby objects that Ctesias cannot have known that such accounts even existed: ‘Woher soll K. auch nur die Existenz derartiger Berichte gekannt haben?’
- 56 See the convenient table of Llewellyn-Jones (2010, 32).
- 57 Momigliano (1969); Bigwood (1978). Of course, that does not alter the fact that there do seem to have been many such random distortions: Bleckmann (2007); Bichler (2011).
- 58 Since the view that all such convergences must be a coincidence is a hypothesis too, it seems rather extreme simply to claim that ‘diese alternativen Quellen in aller Regel *postuliert* werden müssen, sich aber *nicht* unabhängig von Ktesias *nachweisen* lassen’ (original emphasis), as Bichler (2011, 25) does. Both the fragmentary state of Ctesias’ work and the nature of the evidence for ancient Near Eastern historical traditions rather strongly weaken the in itself already problematic argument from silence in this instance. As Lenfant (2004, xxix) noted about approaches like that of Jacoby, Bichler and Bleckmann, ‘ces verdicts ont en commun de n’avoir pour horizon que l’*Enquête* (i.e. Herodotos’ *Histories*)’. Cf. Bichler’s more nuanced statement later on (2011, 37) that ‘der konkrete Nachweis solcher Traditionen in den auf Ktesias beruhenden uns erhaltenen Darstellungen bis dato nicht gerade häufig gelingt’ (original emphasis), after mentioning a case in which he does deem the demonstration successful.
- 59 To what extent Ctesias would have had access to information, though, is not quite clear. Lenfant (2004, xi and xv) claims that ‘de par ses fonctions médicales, Ctésias eut donc à partager l’intimité des grands’ and that ‘il prit part à la vie du palais et ce qu’il y vit et entendit contribua sans nul doute à lui inspirer ses récits’. Georges (1994, 51), however, states that ‘we imagine he had opportunities for observation, discovery and report that he signally failed to use. Yet even as a physician to the consort of Artaxerxes II, and as the king’s envoy to Conon and Evagoras, he was after all only a foreign servant in a great oriental palace. His place on the backstairs of the royal ménage is undoubtedly a chief reason why much of what we have of him reads like harem gossip’. In his account of the battle of Cunaxa, Xenophon (*An.* 1.8.26) calls Ctesias ‘the doctor’ to add authority to his testimony (Gray 2004, 144), but this, of course, is only one instance. This is not the place to engage in the debate over whether Ctesias was a doctor at the Persian court at all: see most recently e.g. Stronk

(2010, 6–10); Madreiter (2012, 37–8 and 40); Wiesehöfer (2013, esp. 128–9 with further references).

- 60 More positive interpretation e.g. in Kuhrt (2007, 7–8).
- 61 The situation is of course rather similar for Herodotus himself: Boedeker (2000, 98), for instance, states about his work that ‘its contents include political/military events, ethnography and local history, and geography; its discourses include those of historical fiction . . . , rationalistic demythologising . . . , critical oral history . . . , and scientific historiography It is difficult to subsume all these kinds of materials and authorial voices under one generic umbrella.’ Yet, one should bear in mind that in antiquity what is obvious historical fiction to us may have been understood differently and that the remaining three ‘discourses’ need not have been as clearly distinguishable. All in all, I would say that all the aspects Boedeker lists are very current in ancient historiography: it is only when using some modern definition of history that these elements seem to fit ill together.
- 62 Most elaborately argued by Woodman (1988); cf. Bleckmann (2006).
- 63 For arguments against Woodman’s view, see Leeman (1989), Moles (1990; 1993), Brock (1991), Bosworth (2003) and Lendon (2009). Moles does accept Woodman’s interpretation of Cicero’s discussion of history, but Leeman’s arguments against it seem conclusive to me.
- 64 Thus recently e.g. Wiesehöfer (2013, 137): ‘Since Ctesias—in spite of some historically correct observations—can scarcely serve as a source for the reconstruction of Achaemenid court life, we have to deliberate again on two of our introductory questions: to which genre does the *Persika* belong, and what intention could the author have had with the publication of his work?’
- 65 Cf. Stengers (1998, 567): ‘L’historien des hautes époques n’a souvent à sa disposition que des sources de piètre qualité, plus ou moins suspectes, et plus souvent plus que moins. En critique rigoureuse, s’il appliquait les règles qu’enseignent les manuels de critique historique, il devrait les écarter, purement et simplement. Il ne le fait pratiquement jamais.’
- 66 Cf. Oakeshott’s observation that history is “‘what the evidence obliges us to believe” (2015, 83). This is not the place to discuss my theory of history, let alone its epistemological foundations, but I would like to stress that I do not intend by any of this to propose a relativistic view of history. From a practical point of view I am largely in agreement with Momigliano (2016); epistemologically, Lorenz (1998) seems of great importance to me.
- 67 Furthermore, to list the aspects of court politics that we expect to find in a properly historical analysis and then to observe that Ctesias does not mention them (as Wiesehöfer 2013, 130–37, does) may be a hazardous argument from silence when dealing with a fragmentary work of which we may not even have 5 per cent: the fragments amount to roughly the length of a single book out of the original twenty-three.
- 68 Cf. Moles (1988, 41): ‘Most ancient historians, especially the greatest among them, do in fact strive constantly to extract general truths from a mass of specifics. . . . If it is to have any meaning beyond the mere recording of specific facts, historiography needs to strike some sort of balance between establishing those facts (so that its raw material is sound) and moving outwards from them to useful generalisations about human behaviour’. Hau (this volume) shows how this worked in Diodorus, likewise an author who offers many stereotypical situations.
- 69 That philosophy is irreconcilable with history has been recently argued e.g. by

Marwick (1995). Unfortunately his limited understanding of some of the views he was reacting against seriously diminishes the value of Marwick's discussion (as was pointed out by White [1995] and in several other reactions in issue 31.1 [1996] of the *Journal of Contemporary History*), but it does illustrate very well how the idea that history's task is first and foremost to establish the specific facts, makes it difficult to give history a philosophical dimension.

- 70 Pace Stronk (2007, esp. 55). On the didactic nature of Greek historiography, see now Hau (2016), who demonstrates convincingly that this is not a feature limited to (late) Hellenistic historiography but instead can be observed from the very start of the tradition. See also Hau (this volume).
- 71 Lenfant 1999, 117; cf. Boedeker (2000, 110) on the indication of 'different levels of credibility' in Herodotus.
- 72 Ctesias had no such disclaimer for the whole of his work according to Strabo (see above, n. 53), but may still have noted the problem in individual instances.
- 73 Such is the conclusion of Bleckmann (2007, esp. 148), who, however, dismisses much of fourth-century Greek historiography (cf. Bleckmann 2006).
- 74 As such the preoccupation with glory was not considered a problem in antiquity. See Moles 1993, 94: 'It is a common ancient assumption, usually implying no criticism that the ancient historian seeks personal glory from his work' (with references in n. 9); Marincola (1997, 57–62).
- 75 I would like to thank Lisa Hau and Ian Ruffell for accepting this paper for their panel at the Celtic Conference and for their help and patience while the final version was being written. To the audiences in Bordeaux, Dublin and Mannheim I am grateful for the constructive discussions that followed the presentation of these ideas. For invaluable criticism on earlier drafts I am also indebted to Guido Schepens and to the anonymous readers. This paper was researched and written while I held a postdoctoral fellowship of the Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO).

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10 The Aesthetics of Truth

Narrative and Historical Understanding in Polybius' *Histories*

Nicolas Wiater

Since Davidson's seminal 1991 paper,¹ the crucial role of perception and visibility in Polybius' narrative has been generally acknowledged. Davidson's discussion has greatly furthered our understanding of the role of these two concepts in individual passages of the *Histories*, with particular reference to battle scenes.² But visibility, I shall argue in this paper, is a crucial element of Polybius' narrative also at a much more fundamental level, with implications far beyond Polybius' account of individual episodes and events of the past: visibility is closely integrated with Polybius' concept of truth and of his narrative as the only available 'true' representation of the development of Roman power. The close connection with truth, in turn, relates visibility to another core concept of Polybius' historical thought, the 'usefulness' of his account for political and military leaders (ἄνδρες πραγματικοί / *andres pragmatikoi*).

The first part of the following discussion will be centred on demonstrating the interrelationship of visibility and truth in Polybius' historical thought. Polybius' conceptions of history (*res gestae*) and historical narrative (*historia rerum gestarum*), I shall argue, are linked by the idea of the visual quality of both past events and their narrative representation, history *and* historiography as *theama*, which is condensed in the metaphor of past and text as body. The same metaphor also invests the truth about the past as it is provided by Polybius' 'universal history', as opposed to the erroneous images of the past produced by narratives focusing on individual places, peoples and events, with a distinctly aesthetic quality: 'seeing' the truth through Polybius' text is as much an intellectual experience as an aesthetic one (part one, section one).

The importance of visibility and truth in Polybius' historical method, I shall propose in the second section of part one, is part of his attempt to undermine the influence and credibility of what must have been one of his strongest competitors in his attempt to create for

himself and his work an exclusive position of authority in the field of history writing, namely the kind of historiography that Polybius calls 'tragic' and which he attacks in his criticism of Phylarchus in book two. Visuality, Polybius' criticism clearly intimates, was a hallmark of this approach to historical writing and, I shall suggest, might have been a crucial element of a very different concept of historical truth espoused by these 'tragic' historians. Polybius' strategy, as it were, is to discredit the use of visuality in the works of his competitors and appropriate and radically redefine the notion for his own concept of a kind of historical narrative that alone, he claims, is both true and useful.

Polybius' appropriation of visuality as a core constituent of his concept of historical truth raises the question of how Polybius avoids the distorting effects of visuality on the reliability of his narrative for which he criticises the 'tragic' historians. Above all, that concerns the strong emotional response any kind of 'graphic' narrative inevitably evokes. This question will be addressed in the second part of this chapter by examining one concrete episode of Polybius' narrative, the downfall and death of Agathocles (15.24a–36), which is often referred to as a primary example of Polybius himself falling prey to the 'sensationalist' allure of 'tragic' history writing. The first section of part two will challenge this view and argue that Polybius, while employing 'graphic' elements designed to involve the reader emotionally, does so only in order to enable a deeper understanding of the force and dangers of emotions as factors in history. Polybius assigns a primary role to emotions as historical causes; understanding the past thus depends on an accurate understanding of the influence of emotions on the course of events. In graphic episodes such as the death of Agathocles, Polybius employs visuality and emotions in order to create precisely the kind of true historical narrative that enables such an accurate understanding of emotions and their consequences and, hence, a 'true' understanding of the past itself.

The chapter concludes (part two, second section) with a discussion of Polybius' own reflections on the story of Agathocles. Raising once more the central issues of the interrelation of historical explanation (causation), the reader's emotional involvement, the benefits of history writing, and the relationship between history writing and tragedy, Polybius' remarks will take us back full circle to, and complement in important ways, his criticism of Phylarchus and the interrelation of truth and aesthetics that were discussed in the first part.

Visuality, Narrative and Truth

The Past as Body: Visuality and the Macro-Structure of History

Near the beginning of Polybius' work a programmatic passage underlines the fundamental importance of visuality to Polybius' interpretation of the past. Polybius' central contention is that the extension of Roman power between 220 and 168 BC gradually transformed the previously individual states and political entities of the *oikoumene* into a new, interconnected whole, a process that he has captured in the powerful metaphor of the *symploke* ('interweaving'). At 1.4.4 and 1.4.6–11,³ Polybius uses the comparison with a body to illustrate the impact of the *symploke* both on the physical fabric, as it were, of the *oikoumene* and the design of his narrative as a textual representation of this development. All previously independent parts of the *oikoumene* are now interrelated through their relationship with Rome and have to be seen as parts of a new, organic whole, just as adequate perception (ικανῶς αὐτόπται γενέσθαι) of the functional design and beauty of a living creature (τῆς ἐνεργείας αὐτοῦ τοῦ ζώου καὶ καλλονῆς, 1.4.7) is possible only if one sees its body as a whole and all its different parts in their interrelation and interdependence. Any attempt at perceiving and appreciating the body as an entity by looking at its severed limbs individually would be as futile as an attempt to understand the structure of the *oikoumene* after 168 by looking at the events in one or several of its parts in isolation from the rest.

Some important implications of this passage have been drawn out recently by Adriana Zangara. The most noticeable is that Polybius is the first author in the history of historiography who in his conception of the body-shaped past (ιστορία οἰονεὶ σωματοειδής, 1.3.4) has merged *res gestae* and *historia rerum gestarum*: 'L'*historia* a pris corps'.⁴ Zangara convincingly links this conception with Polybius' stress on *synopsis* (the 'seeing all together, comprehensive view') as the distinctive characteristic of his 'universal history':⁵ after the 140th Olympiad, universal historiography à la Polybius is the only possible form of historical narrative because it alone is informed by the *symploke* of the events and can lead the reader to understand the new, bodily form of the *oikoumene*.⁶

What I would like to emphasise here is the programmatic connection between aesthetics, visuality and truth that represents the

leitmotif of the comparison and is, indeed, characteristic of Polybius' historical narrative throughout.⁷ Polybius' narrative design draws its legitimacy from his assertion that it alone enables the reader to understand (perceive) the 'true' nature of the *oikoumene* during and after the rise of Roman power.⁸ At the same time, however, it is only through Polybius' narrative that the *symploke* nature of the *oikoumene* becomes perceivable in the first place: the *Histories* creates the *symploke* fabric of the *oikoumene* through presupposing it.⁹

By drawing out the visual impact inherent in this central concept, the body comparison supports Polybius' aim to convince the reader of the correctness ('truth') of his interpretation of the past: the right (i.e., Polybius') way of perceiving and understanding the past is associated with the living and beautiful body, while the (deliberately off-putting) image of looking at a dismembered dead body illustrates the wrong, outdated (pre-*symploke*) approach to historical understanding. The truth to which Polybius' narrative grants access is beautiful and as such more appealing than the alternative, which, quite literally, pictures the *oikoumene* as an assemblage of unconnected, severed body parts.

At the same time, these 'aesthetics of truth' are linked with one of the main purposes of the *Histories*, its usefulness to the reader:¹⁰ the *symploke* is at the same time 'most beautiful and most profitable' (κάλλιστον ἅμα δ' ὠφελιμώτατον, 1.4.4); consequently, only Polybius' universal history, which alone allows the readers fully to perceive (κατοπτρεύσας, lit. 'observe from a vantage point') the *symploke*,¹¹ can provide 'both benefit and pleasure' (ἅμα καὶ τὸ χρήσιμον καὶ τὸ τερπνόν, 1.4.11).¹² Polybius clearly conceives of the overall perception and understanding of the *symploke* (and the usefulness of this perception for his readers) provided by his narrative as a pleasurable experience: it is somehow aesthetically satisfactory to achieve a synoptic view of the new design of the *oikoumene*.¹³ As much as it might surprise us, at the heart of the 'rationalist' Polybius' interpretation of the past lies a fundamentally aesthetic concept, the idea of the *symploke* as a beautiful body the perception of which as such induces pleasure.¹⁴

Visuality, Causation and Truth: Polybius vs. 'Tragic' Historiography

While the previous section explored the interrelation of visuality, aesthetics and truth in Polybius' overall vision of the past, his criticism

of Phylarchus' sensational but unauthentic account of the siege of Mantinea in 223 (2.56.7–16) provides insight into the role of visuality in the narrative of individual events. Here we shall find visuality closely connected with the reader's emotional involvement in the narrative, which, in turn, is an essential part of historical understanding and the benefits that Polybius envisages his work to provide.

According to Polybius, Phylarchus' narrative was designed to provoke an emotional response from the reader (σπουδάζων δ' εἰς ἔλεον ἐκκαλεῖσθαι τοὺς ἀναγινώσκοντας καὶ συμπαθεῖς ποιεῖν 'his eagerness to arouse the pity and compassion of his readers', 2.56.7), and his method of doing so was to create a visual, 'graphic', narrative (περιώμενος <έν> ἐκάστοις ἀεὶ πρὸ ὀφθαλμῶν τιθέναι τὰ δεινὰ 'trying to bring horrors vividly before our eyes', 2.56.8) by providing as much detail as possible: any speeches that could have been given (ἐνδεχομένους) in the situations described, whether they were actually pronounced or not,¹⁵ and a large number of circumstantial details (τὰ παρεπόμενα τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις ἐξαριθμεῖσθαι 'to enumerate the concomitant circumstances'), again, the context suggests, without much regard for whether these details were authentic.¹⁶

As in his own concept of narrative aesthetics (part one, first section), Polybius links visuality and truth: the number of circumstantial details, which Polybius, in accordance with the ancient concept of *enargeia*, regards as responsible for the visual quality of Phylarchus' narrative and the emotional response it provokes,¹⁷ creates a false impression of authenticity and reliability, a procedure that Polybius considers appropriate for the writing of tragedies (διὰ τῶν πιθανωτάτων λόγων ἐκπληῖξαι καὶ ψυχαγωγῆσαι κατὰ τὸ παρὸν τοὺς ἀκούοντας 'to thrill and charm the audience for the moment by the verisimilitude of the words', 2.56.11).¹⁸ The task of the historian, by contrast, is 'simply to record what really happened and what really was said, however commonplace' (τῶν δὲπραχθέντων καὶ ῥηθέντων κατ' ἀλήθειαν αὐτῶν μνημονεύειν πάνπαν, <κ>ἂν πάνυ μέτρια τυγχάνωσιν ὄντα, 2.56.10) and 'to instruct and convince serious students once and for all by narrating the true facts and speeches' (διὰ τῶν ἀληθινῶν ἔργων καὶ λόγων εἰς τὸν πάντα χρόνον διδάξαι καὶ πείσαι τοὺς φιλομαθοῦντας, 56.11).

The clear-cut dichotomy Polybius establishes between his own and Phylarchus' 'tragic' kind of historical writing makes it easy to overlook some deceptive similarities between his and Phylarchus' approaches. In fact, emotions play an equally crucial role in Polybius' narrative as

in Phylarchus', albeit in a different way. In Polybius' *Histories* emotions are an important element of the historical agents' psychology and, as such, essential to understanding causation: 'our notions of things, our state of mind, our reasoning about these' are what lies behind all our actions (ἐπινοίας καὶ διαθέσεις καὶ τοὺς περὶ ταῦτα συλλογισμούς, 3.6.7). Polybius' analysis of the causes of the Hannibalic War thus identifies the 'wrath of the Barcids' and the Carthaginians' collective resentment of the Romans after the unlawful annexation of Sardinia in 238 as the primary causes of the conflict (3.9.6–10.4).¹⁹ Such a proper understanding of the past, moreover, can only be achieved by embedding individual events into their larger context in order to make their interrelationship(s) evident. Like Phylarchus, Polybius therefore defines the narration of circumstantial detail—a core constituent of *enargeia* (above)—as a crucial aspect of history writing: 'I maintain that far the most essential part of history is the consideration of the consequences of events, their concomitant circumstances, and especially their causes' (ἀκμὴν γὰρ φαμεν ἀναγκαιότατα μέρη τῆς ἱστορίας εἶναι τὰ τ' ἐπιγινόμενα τοῖς ἔργοις καὶ τὰ παρεπόμενα καὶ μάλιστα <τὰ> περὶ τὰς αἰτίας, 3.32.6).²⁰ Polybius wants to make his readers 'spectators' of the past just as much as Phylarchus does.²¹

These similarities in narrative method might, at least in part, account for the vehemence with which Polybius feels compelled to distance himself from Phylarchus' 'tragic' historiography.²² Polybius attempts to establish his 'universal history' as the new and only adequate way of writing history under Roman rule²³ by appropriating key concepts of the already well-established and respected (ἀποδοχῆς, 2.56.1) tradition of historical writing represented by Phylarchus and using them against this very type of history writing in the process. The same procedure is typical of his engagement with other predecessors, especially Thucydides, on whose terms and concepts he draws when defining both his approach to causation (3.6.7) and his concept of the usefulness of historical narratives (3.31.11–13).²⁴

If we believe Polybius' characterisation of Phylarchus' narrative,²⁵ the most important difference between his and Phylarchus' method is Polybius' emphasis on the accuracy ('truth') of the events that are represented in his narrative and evoke the reader's emotional response. Whereas the reader's emotional involvement was an end in itself in Phylarchus' work and the truth of the reported events and circumstances of secondary importance as long as the narrative had the desired effect (p. 205 above), Polybius insists that the reader's emotional response needs to result from an authentic representation of

the past; only thus can it be, as he puts it, ‘legitimate’ (εὐλόγως) and ‘proper’ (καθηκόντως).²⁶

Polybius thus expects his narrative to be just as emotionally engaging as Phylarchus’; the crucial difference is that he integrates the reader’s emotional response into the process of historical understanding. Polybius employs the account of (historically accurate) circumstantial detail (τὰ παρεπόμενα τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις) and the resulting *visuality* (*enargeia*; above) to enable an accurate understanding of the events and their causal interrelations, including and especially the role of the historical agents’ ‘notions of things, state of mind, and reasoning about these’ (3.6.7; p. 205 above; cf. 2.56.16).²⁷ The same visual quality that makes this accurate historical understanding possible also enables readers to engage with the (narrative of the) events ‘legitimately’ and ‘properly’ (above), because it bases their emotional response on a solid foundation of true facts. *Visuality* in Polybius’ *Histories* thus constitutes the crucial link between the reader’s emotional involvement in the narrative and the accurate understanding of the events and their causal interrelations, that is, historical truth.

As *visuality* is linked so closely with historical truth, it is also linked with another core constituent of Polybius’ concept of history writing, the ‘usefulness’ (ὠφέλεια, 2.56.12) of the historical narrative: only the authentic image produced by a ‘true’ account in Polybius’ sense,²⁸ an account, that is, which accurately describes the events themselves along with their causes and consequences (2.56.13, 16), provides the active statesmen and politicians (ἄνδρες πραγματικοί / *andres pragmatikoi*) whom Polybius envisages as his readers²⁹ with the kind of reliable knowledge of the past that enables them realistically to estimate the success of their own plans and purposes.³⁰ An accurate image, quite literally, of the past enables Polybius’ readers to ‘read’ real-life situations in the same way in which the historical figures in his narrative ‘read’ their own situations and devise courses of actions on this basis;³¹ Polybius’ readers, however, profit from their knowledge of the success or failure of the ‘reading’ and corresponding courses of action of the historical agents when finding themselves in similar circumstances (3.31.7–8).

The alternative is not, then, between true and useful, but unexciting, and entertaining, but invented and, hence, useless, narratives. Polybius’ point is, rather, that a true narrative offers as much pleasure as an invented one, even though, unlike its ‘tragic’ counterpart, it has not been specifically designed to please, and *also* enables successful action in the present. Polybius is redefining truth as

an aesthetic phenomenon. This also explains why Polybius regards the useful and the pleasurable as so closely interrelated:³² the beneficial is pleasurable because it is directly based, and dependent, on historical truth.³³

As with Polybius' concept of the specific unity and aesthetics of his narrative,³⁴ his criticism of Phylarchus, too, evokes concepts and ideas familiar from Aristotle's *Poetics* that are too numerous and too obvious to be dismissed as merely accidental.³⁵ The most salient example is probably the programmatic preference that Polybius ascribes to Phylarchus for verisimilitude and persuasiveness over factual accuracy and truth, along with the specific emotions (horror, τὰ δεινὰ, 2.56.9, anger, ὀργίζεσθαι, 56.13, and pity, ἔλεον, συμπαθεῖς, 56.7) that it is designed to arouse and makes his narrative so pleasurable.³⁶ These similarities do not presuppose that Polybius had first-hand knowledge of Aristotle's work; he probably did not.³⁷ But it is not much of a stretch to assume that at Polybius' time a critical-philosophical tradition persisted that privileged tragedy's merely plausible narratives, along with the emotions this narrative form arouses and the kind of understanding it provides, over the kind of knowledge and its benefits provided by factually accurate ('true') history. As Polybius' criticism of Phylarchus shows, he regarded Phylarchus' works as influenced by this tradition and strongly reacted to what he viewed as a contamination of tragedy and historiography by claiming truth and knowledge as the sole domain of historiography while limiting the purpose of tragedy (and the kind of history influenced by it) to the arousal of emotions for its own sake, without, as he saw it, any cognitive or intellectual benefit.

The same Aristotelian echoes, however, should warn us simply to accept Polybius' characterisation and negative judgement of Phylarchus' historical and narrative method. In fact, Polybius' criticism of Phylarchus might be seen as a reflection of a conflict between competing conceptions of 'historical truth' and, thus, of a 'plurality of truths' in the Hellenistic period the importance of which in modern debates has justly been emphasised by Lisa Hau and Ian Ruffell in the Introduction to this volume.

If we assume that Polybius' criticism reflects genuine characteristics of Phylarchus' work, we might hypothesise that Phylarchus, like many historians and historical theorists today, and Aristotle, as far as tragic plots were concerned, in antiquity, did not see factual truth and the sort of analytical-rational attitude towards the past as advocated by Polybius as essential elements of narrative truth. To him, the immediate emotional re-experience of the past through visual

representation of the events might have been more important than the carefully analysed presentation of a wealth of accurate information about cause, effect and motivation that Polybius regarded as fundamental.³⁸ Phylarchus was certainly no forerunner of postmodern historical discourse; but thinking about (what little we know of) his work in conjunction with, for example, Eelco Runia's discussion of the importance of the 'presencing'³⁹ effect of historical artifacts for our relationship with the past or experimental forms of writing history such as Keith Hopkins' *A World Full of Gods* (1999) and Jonathan Walker's *Pistols! Treason! Murder!* (2007), might help us develop an alternative view of the aims and methods of 'tragic' historiography and counterbalance Polybius' one-sided polemics.

As argued above, Polybius felt the need to distinguish himself so clearly from Phylarchus because he appropriated some of his distinctive notions as the basis of his own historical project. If Phylarchus' 'tragic' historiography, was, in fact, as I suggest here, a serious attempt to represent historical 'truth' and make it accessible by way of a specific narrative strategy, Polybius had all the more reason to define the dividing lines between Phylarchus and himself as clearly and aggressively as possible.⁴⁰ Polybius redefined visibility as a core element of the nature of the past and its narrative representation.⁴¹ He severed the ties between probability and *enargeia*, which he regarded as characteristic of 'tragic' historiography, establishing a firm link between visibility and factual truth instead.⁴² He also did not limit visibility to individual episodes and their narrative design, as in 'tragic' historiography, but conceived of the past as a whole as being inherently 'visual': his narrative made the novel, bodily structure of the world under Roman rule visible and, thus, understandable by, quite literally, 'embodying' it.⁴³

We cannot know how novel, or radical, Polybius' conception of the visibility of the past and its truth value really was, but his concept of a visual ontology, as it were, of historiography is certainly remarkable. By merging aesthetics, narrative design and factual truth, he essentially ascribes the same power of true understanding through representation to factual narratives, τὰ γενόμενα, that Aristotle had attributed primarily to possible narratives, οἷα ἂν γένοιτο, while maintaining the crucial role of emotions as an important way of connecting with, and understanding, the past, thus programmatically redefining central tenets of pre-existing approaches to narrative, emotions, historical understanding and truth, Polybius created a historical narrative the very design of which sent a strong message to his readers: the rise of Roman power had inaugurated a new era; no work but the *Histories* enabled an appropriate understanding of the

implications and consequences of this new era; the *Histories* was nothing like anything they had seen before.

No Applause for Agathocles: Visuality, Emotions and Historical Understanding in Polybius' Narrative

Distant Spectators: Reading the Death of Agathocles

The preceding discussion was centred on the role of visuality at the macro level of the *Histories*: its role in Polybius' conception of the history of the world under Rome as *symploke* and its relationship with key constituents of his historical method, especially truth, emotions (as part of Polybius' concept of causation) and the usefulness of his work. This section will complement the results of this discussion by exploring the role of these concepts in one concrete episode of the *Histories*, the downfall of Agathocles, guardian of Ptolemy V and, after the death of the influential Sosibius in 204,⁴⁴ the main leader of Egyptian politics until his violent death in 203, at 15.24a–36.⁴⁵ Emotions play a prominent role as forces driving the events that constitute this self-contained episode, and its striking theatricality has often been seen (erroneously, as I shall argue) as an example of Polybius himself employing the techniques of 'tragic' historiography.⁴⁶ This alone makes it well suited for an in-depth exploration of the interplay of visuality and emotions (both at the level of the narrative and as part of the reader's response to it) and how they relate to Polybius' concept of truth and the concomitant usefulness of his narrative. Moreover, Polybius himself alerts the reader to the significance of these issues in the (narrative of the) fate of Agathocles by supplementing it with a detailed authorial comment (15.34–6), thus turning his treatment of these events into a paradigm of proper historical writing. His remarks, which complement in significant ways the results of the first part of this chapter, will be discussed in the second section of part two.

Visuality (and theatricality), with the explicit aim of arousing emotions, are a *leitmotif* of Polybius' narrative of Agathocles' downfall;⁴⁷ due to restrictions of time and space, however, the present discussion will be centred on one, particularly significant, scene, the violent deaths of Agathocles and his family at the hands of the angry crowd (33.1–13). This violent end of the narrative is the culmination of the rule of a man whose power was achieved through deceit and

murder and characterised by debauchery and insolent behaviour; who was the object of hatred of the crowd from the very beginning; and who failed at each attempt either to reconcile the populace or to secure the support of the soldiers.

Appropriately for an episode in which theatricality and emotions play such a prominent role, the climax of Polybius' Agathocles narrative takes place in a stadium. When Philo, one of Agathocles' servants, enters the stadium with a hangover and insults the instigated crowd, events take a violent turn (αἶμα καὶ φόνους, 15.33.1). The passage is worth quoting in full (33.4–13):

when he [Philo] attempted to defend himself some very soon tore off his cloak and others levelling their spears at him transpierced him. Then as soon as he was ignominiously (μεθ' ὕβρεως) dragged still quivering (ἔτι σπαίροντα) into the middle of the stadium and the masses had tasted blood (γεύσασθαι τὰ πλῆθη φόνου), they all eagerly awaited the arrival of the others. It was not long before Agathocles was led in in fetters, and as soon as he entered some people ran up and at once stabbed him, an act of benevolence rather than of enmity, for they thus saved him from suffering the downfall he deserved (τῆς ἀρμοζούσης καταστροφῆς). Next Nico was brought there and after him Agathoclea stripped naked with her sisters and then all her relatives. Last of all they dragged Oenanthe from the Thesmophorium and led her to the stadium naked on horseback. All of them were delivered into the hands of the mob, and now some began to bite them with their teeth, some to stab them and others to dig out their eyes. Whenever one of them fell they tore the body from limb to limb until they had thus mutilated them all. For terrible is the cruelty of the people of Egypt when their anger is aroused (δεινὴ γάρ τις ἡ περὶ τοὺς θυμοὺς ὡμότης γίνεται τῶν κατὰ τὴν Αἴγυπτον ἀνθρώπων) . . . Such was the end of Agathocles, Agathoclea, and their kindred.

This portion of Polybius' narrative is clearly characterised by a certain *visuality* and *dramatisation*,⁴⁸ created through the insertion of circumstantial information such as Philo being 'still quivering', the nakedness of Agathoclea and Oenanthe,⁴⁹ and the latter being brought in on a horse. Moreover, instead of just reporting summarily that they were all 'violently killed by the mob', Polybius presents a detailed account of the different ways in which the people mutilated them. The metaphor that 'the masses had tasted blood' in particular contributes to creating a 'graphic' representation and bridges the literal and metaphorical by anticipating the mob actually using their teeth to kill and mutilate Agathocles and his family. The passage thus seems to invite a 'sensational' reading, with possible emotional reactions ranging from disgust at the masses' violence via pity with the victims to a certain *Schadenfreude* about Agathocles and his family getting what they deserve (τῆς ἀρμοζούσης καταστροφῆς, 34.7); we can even imagine some readers responding to the more voyeuristic elements of the scene, in particular the combination of violence and

However, this ‘sensational’ aspect of the passage is counteracted by several other elements, which, while not discouraging emotional involvement as such, are designed to establish distance and, thus, keep the readers’ emotions within certain limits. To begin with, Polybius’ account of the deaths of Agathocles and his family remains, in fact, rather summary despite the level of detail. Neither the women’s nakedness nor the mutilations of the bodies is further elaborated on and there is no description of the victims’ sufferings (so prominent in Phylarchus’ narrative, 2.56.7; part one, second section above). Polybius avoids granting any more prominence to what Aristotle calls *πάθος* than absolutely necessary;⁵¹ his text both encourages the reader’s emotional involvement and keeps it in check.⁵²

Moreover, the scene is interspersed with more or less explicit expressions that prompt readers to consider the appropriateness of their emotional reactions: *μεθ’ ὕβρεως* (‘ignominiously’) gives the actions described here a distinctly negative tone, an effect that is further supported by the fact that the atrocities are committed by the masses (including ordinary soldiers).⁵³ Polybius’ image of the masses is generally negative and he regards their irrational and uncontrolled behaviour in particular as a permanent danger to social order.⁵⁴ We can therefore assume that Polybius meant his description of a mob out of control, even reverting to beastlike behaviour (‘the masses had tasted blood’; ‘some began to bite them with their teeth’), to cause readers to dissociate themselves from the historical agents, provoking both shock at the unchained force of the crowd as well as reflection about the dangers such a crowd presents to the members of the political and military elite.⁵⁵ And even readers missing those subtler clues would probably be prompted to question their reactions by Polybius’ comment that ‘terrible is the cruelty of the people in Egypt when their anger is aroused’, which qualifies the actions described here as those not simply of a mob out of control but of a non-Greek, uncivilised (*ὠμότης*) mob;⁵⁶ I shall return to this point below.

Finally, encouragement to observe the events in the stadium at a rational distance also comes from Polybius’ remark that Agathocles’ quick death prevented him from suffering the fate he deserved (*τῆς ἀρμοζούσης καταστροφῆς*).⁵⁷ This phrase recalls the *ἀρμοζούσης τιμωρίας* (32.5) demanded by the crowd in order to ‘make an example’ (*παραδειγματίζειν*) of Agathocles and his family: apparently, the crowd initially simply wanted to watch the public execution of Agathocles and his relatives carried out by the soldiers in

the stadium. At the level of the *res gestae*, however, this παραδειγματίζειν (above) never happens: instead of confining themselves to the role of spectators, the people are overcome by their emotions and take on the role of executioners. At the level of the *historia rerum gestarum*, however, this very transformation of the masses from spectators to agents allows Polybius to present Agathocles' death as such an effective paradigm (or rather, anti-paradigm) not only of the consequences of political leadership that relies on murder, lies and licentiousness, but also of the dangers presented by a populace out of control: the crowd succumbing to the forces of their emotions and vacating their role as spectators invites the reader to do the opposite, maintain their rational distance and self-control and adopt, at the level of the *historia rerum gestarum*, the very position as spectators abandoned by the masses at the level of the *res gestae* in order to analyse the dynamics, actions and kinds of behaviour that resulted in Agathocles' downfall.⁵⁸

These various elements of Polybius' text counter-act the potential 'enthralled' effect of the graphic elements of the episode and prevent any kind of self-effacement of the act of narrating that is so characteristic, for example, of Thucydides' narrative:⁵⁹ Polybius' readers remain aware of the fact that they are reading a text carefully crafted and controlled by the author that separates them from the historical agents and that there is, and has to be, a fundamental difference between reading about events and participating in them. Unlike the Egyptians in the stadium, who, under the force of their hatred and anger, turn from spectators into active and brutal agents, Polybius' readers are privileged with a comprehensive ('synoptic') view of the situation that allows them to transcend not only the limited perspective of each group of the individual agents in the narrative but also their own spontaneous emotional reactions.⁶⁰ Rather than encouraging the unreflected, purely instinctive responses that Polybius attributes to 'tragic' historiography, he prompts readers to reflect about how they reacted to the narrative, what provoked that initial, instinctive reaction and whether it was appropriate. Their emotions are integrated into the rational-analytical assessment of the events, rather than being a means of involving the readers in them.

Adapting Emily Greenwood's observation on Thucydides' 'History's sustained illustration of the precariousness of sight, when not disciplined by insight and reflection',⁶¹ we might say that Polybius' version of the death of Agathocles illustrates the precariousness of emotions prompted by sight when not checked by insight and reflection. Readers who initially enjoyed the 'spectacle' of Agathocles' death and empathised with the masses might now feel ashamed about

their reactions, which risk putting them, members of the Greek elite, on a par with an out-of-control Egyptian mob. The characterisation of the actions of the Egyptian masses as ὤμότης in particular couples the reader's emotional reaction with his self-definition as a civilised Greek and provokes the question of how a member of the Greek elite should react when confronted with this or similar situations.⁶² The shock and disgust at the mob violence that other readers might have felt now complement and, thus, enrich their rational understanding of the dangers of the masses; they also make Agathocles' inadequacy as an example for the reader in similar situations all the more evident.⁶³ A reader initially enjoying the sufferings of the regent and his relatives, however, might gain a better understanding of the force of emotions as a factor in public life that can decide about a leader's life or death.⁶⁴ In any case, however, Polybius' text raises the readers' awareness of their own emotions and alerts them to the dangers inherent in unfiltered emotional reactions to narratives of events and real-life situations alike.⁶⁵ The gist of Polybius' message is simple: if you behave like an uncivilised barbarian, you will (and deserve to) end like one.

Causation, Usefulness, Aesthetics, and Why the Story of Agathocles' Life Lacks All of Them

Polybius complements his narrative of the fate of Agathocles with theoretical reflections on the usefulness and aesthetic quality of the events (15.34–6). His fundamental point is that Agathocles' fate is but a random sequence of events. This fact disqualifies it from serious historical attention because (1) random events offer no valuable lesson for the reader (15.34–5) and (2) the particular aesthetics of such random events, the 'shock effect' of sudden reversals of fortune, are suitable only for tragedies, not histories (15.36).⁶⁶ Polybius' comments in 15.36 show that he attributes the same inherent aesthetic quality to individual events as to the macro-structure of the *res gestae*, the *symploke* (part one, section one). Moreover, Polybius here links this aesthetic effect of particular events directly with their causal interrelation (or lack thereof), thus granting us further insight into how exactly he envisages the relationship between aesthetics, truth and usefulness discussed in the first part of this chapter.

Polybius begins his discussion by criticising historians who attempted to invest the events of Agathocles' life and death with a deeper meaning by either turning them into a paradigm of the unpredictability of *tyche* or 'rationalising the paradoxicality of the

events' (τὸ παράδοξον τῶν συμβεβηκότων ὑπὸ λόγον ἄγοντες⁶⁷) by 'bolstering' the events with 'reasons or probable causes' (τοῖς γεγρονόσι αἰτίας καὶ πιθανότητας ὑποτάττειν, 34.2) in order to make them appear more plausible. Polybius does not provide much further information on these authors, and attempts to resolve the question are unlikely to produce definitive results.⁶⁸ What deserves stressing in the context of this volume, however, is the fact that, once more, Polybius evokes a discourse of plural 'truths' (or truth claims, assuming that the authors referred to here made such) as the background to his own narrative.⁶⁹ While, as suggested above, Polybius' pragmatic-universal and Phylarchus' 'tragic' historiography can be seen as an example of a plurality of different methodological approaches to historical truth and its narrative representation, the story of the life and death of Agathocles is an example of a plurality of different versions of the same set of events. Different authors apparently applied different interpretive strategies to these events (emplotted them in different ways, we might say) in an attempt to make sense of what all of them (including Polybius; see below) appear to have identified as their fundamental 'theme', namely their paradoxical nature (τὸ παράδοξον τῶν συμβεβηκότων).

The scarcity of our information makes it impossible to determine whether the co-existence of competing interpretations of these events was already addressed by the authors Polybius refers to here and whose accounts he obviously used as the basis of his own 'true' representation of the life and downfall of Agathocles. To put it differently, was the (meta-) discussion of the implications, problems and consequences inherent in the co-existence of different 'true' versions about Agathocles already part of the pre-existing historical discourse? Or is Polybius deliberately reading the existence of different versions of these events as a story, as it were, of an ongoing and ever-failing attempt to come to terms with these events? Whether or not Polybius introduced the idea of 'plural', and therefore, he claims, unreliable 'truths', he did, in any case, use this idea strategically in order to create a foil for the introduction of his own interpretation that will once and for all silence the dissonance of all those different historical voices and substitute it with the one, real 'truth' constituted by his own version. Polybius uses a similar strategy also elsewhere in his work, for example when he presents his discussion of the legal aspects of the outbreak of the Hannibalic War in the third book as the ὁμολογουμένη θεωρία ('the definitive survey') that finally ends a complicated, chaotic and polyphonus legal discourse (3.21.8–30.41, the phrase ὁμολογουμένη θεωρία at 3.21.10).⁷⁰

Polybius' rejection of either attempt to invest the (story of the) events of Agathocles' rise and downfall is ultimately grounded on his concept of causation: to Polybius, the decisive causal factors in history are the historical agents whose ideas, emotions, aims and ambitions drive their actions; these, in turn, interact with the actions and intentions of other historical agents, thus producing the complex interrelations of series of events we call 'history' (p. 205–206 above). According to Polybius, however, Agathocles never contributed actively to either his success or his downfall (34.3–4); his rise to power was primarily due to random external factors, including the weakness of those in power (15.34.5–6), while his 'lack of manliness and insolence' (δὲ ἀνανδρίαν καὶ ῥαθυμίαν, 34.6), that is, again, his inability to drive events rather than being driven by them, is ultimately responsible for his downfall: when events around him come to a head, Agathocles even actively gives up acting and thinking.⁷¹

Like the authors he criticises, Polybius regards unexpected turns of events (τὸ παράδοξον) as the constitutive feature of (the story of) Agathocles' life;⁷² unlike these historians, however, he believes that this is all there is to it and refuses to give Agathocles' fate any (as he sees it) artificial significance by turning it either into a lesson about the mutability of fortune or a serious account of the actions and achievements of a real political leader who endeavoured to shape the course of events rather than being shaped by them. Polybius' repeated emphasis on coincidence and chance should therefore be seen as an important element of his interpretation of the episode, not a reflection of his sources:⁷³ by coincidence did Agathocles stumble onto the political stage and by coincidence did he leave it again soon afterwards, when his henchman Philo 'by chance' (ἐκ ταύτοματτος, 33.1) staggered half-drunk into the stadium and antagonised the crowd (33.4–13, cited p. 209–210 above).

Polybius' point is that, if the development of events is not shaped by a personality, a historical agent's character, attitude, designs and actions (3.6.7), there is nothing to explain. And if there is nothing to explain, if the events, that is, did not follow any discernible pattern that a reader might be able to recognise in his own time and use as guideline for his own plans and actions (p. 207 above), there is nothing he can learn from them; it is their randomness that renders stories like that of Agathocles useless. Elaborate narratives (τὸν ἐπιμετροῦντα λόγον, 34.1; τὸν ἐκδιδάσκοντα λόγον, 35.7)⁷⁴ make sense only for the achievements of πραγματικωτάτους καὶ σὺν νῶι τολμηρωτάτους ἄνδρας ('the greatest statesmen combining courage and reason') such as the Sicilian Agathocles and Dionysius (35.6–7),⁷⁵ from whose actions and behaviour the reader can draw valuable

lessons.

The same randomness disqualifies the story of Agathocles from elaborate treatment in historiography also for another reason: random turns of events, Polybius says at 36.2, have a certain appeal only when heard about or seen for the first time; narratives that draw on them repeatedly quickly become trite and unattractive, since one is exactly like the other.⁷⁶ The ultimate goal of all those intent on serious study being the useful and the pleasurable (ὠφέλειας καὶ τέρψεως, 36.3), such cheap one-off (μία·ν . . . φαντασίαν τὴν πρώτην ‘the very first time [such shocking reversals of fortune] are presented to us’, 36.2; εἰσάπαξ μὲν καὶ πρῶτον ‘once and for all at first’, 36.5) effects belong to tragedy, not historiography (36.7).⁷⁷

Polybius’ less than sophisticated appreciation of tragedy aside,⁷⁸ this passage is an important complement to the discussion of Polybius’ concept of the aesthetics of the past in the first part of this chapter. As demonstrated there, Polybius conceives of the past after the *sympleke* and its narrative as a body: as the beauty and functionality (ἐνέργεια) of the body can be comprehended only when its limbs are contemplated in their interrelation, it is the historiographer’s task to explain the past by making the interrelationship of the historical events visible in terms of their causes and effects (p. 206 above). We can now understand the fundamental assumptions on which this image and the identification of *res gestae* and *historia rerum gestarum*, which Zangara has identified as distinctive of Polybius’ *Histories* (p. 204 above), are based.

Polybius, not unlike Aristotle, regards coherence of events (their δι’ ἄλληλα, *Po.* 9.1452a4) and the unity (ὅλης πράξεως, *Po.* 7.1450b24) that results from it, as aesthetically satisfactory.⁷⁹ But while Aristotle held that unity, coherence and their aesthetic effect can be achieved only in a plot, as the result of the author’s skills (*Po.* 9.1452a4), Polybius’ observation that the story of Agathocles lacks this aesthetic appeal because the events themselves lack inner, that is, causal, coherence, demonstrates *ex negativo* that he believes that this kind of unity and coherence is inherent in the historical events themselves or, more precisely, in those events that have more than merely local relevance and more than mere entertainment value (see further below). The task of the author is therefore not to use his skills artificially to create this unity but critically to select from the wealth of his material the events that possess such coherence, unity and beauty and create a narrative that accurately re-presents (makes ‘visible’) these properties.

The individual constituents of Polybius' approach to history(-writing)—causation, aesthetics, narrative representation and the usefulness of his narrative—are all linked by the idea of the inner, 'natural' coherence of events: a 'true' *historia rerum gestarum*, an account, that is, which provides a proper explanation of causes and effects by narrating events in context, is beautiful because it reflects the beauty inherent in the causal interrelations of the *res gestae*. At the same time, such an account is useful because it alone provides the kind of reliable insight into these causal interrelations—their, as Aristotle would put it, δι' ἁλληλῶν—that allows readers to make use of their knowledge of the past for their own actions. Usefulness and beauty share the same fundamental qualities: coherence, unity, order and purpose.⁸⁰ That is why the past itself is both aesthetically pleasing and useful.

The exception to the rule are some episodes of local history that do not follow the usual mechanisms of causation and are determined by 'chance' instead (36.8–9). This affects the usefulness and the aesthetic potential of both the events themselves and their narrative representation. That is precisely what is happening in the case of Agathocles: an accumulation of episodes without any meaningful connection might be of interest to local historians,⁸¹ who lack the proper perspective competently to assess their significance (36.8–9) and therefore attempt to invest them with a deeper meaning than they actually have (above). Polybius and his envisaged readers, however, see them as what they are: a random sequence of events that might be suitable material for tragedies and its recipients' desire for the cheap kick of unexpected reversals of fortune, but are of neither beauty nor use to ἄνδρες πραγματικοί (*andres pragmatikoi*, 'men of action'). The life of Agathocles, as Polybius narrates it, 'is no more than the sum of contingent facts, of flukes, of random events that divulge nothing but their own lack of purpose';⁸² the only reason for it to be brought up in a universal history such as Polybius' is so that it can be ignored or, at best, serve as an example of how not to live your life or write history.

Conclusions

Visuality and aesthetics lie at the heart of Polybius' historical theory and narrative practice. His conception of history since the 140th Olympiad as *symploke*, which represents the core of his interpretation of the past and informs the structure of his work, finds its expression in the visual notion of both *res gestae* and *historia rerum gestarum* as a living body. Only through a synoptic view of its individual parts in their interrelation can the (past-as-)body be understood in both its

functionality (ἐνέργεια) and its beauty (καλλωνή). The *symploke* is thus an explanatory and an aesthetic concept: only understanding the interrelation of the individual elements of the structure of the world under Roman rule can result in a comprehensive understanding of this structure, and only through the mental image emerging from this process does the beauty of the past become perceivable in the first place.

The idea of a meaningful interrelation of the individual parts on the macro level of the past also informs Polybius' narrative of individual episodes, which is distinguished by the attempt to reveal the interrelationship of individual events with other events that constitute their causes, consequences and relevant circumstances. Polybius, I argued, conceived this kind of detailed narrative and the specific 'visuality' resulting from it, in deliberate opposition to the *enargeia* that distinguished historical narratives such as that of Phylarchus. In order to do so, Polybius drew on the same notions, ideas and narrative techniques as Phylarchus but programmatically redefined and appropriated them. Phylarchus, Polybius claims, invented details for the sake of causing a specific emotional reaction. The visuality of his own narrative, by contrast, results from the narration of true events only, but has the same emotional-aesthetic (and, in addition, didactic) effect.

Polybius' approach to visuality and emotions in historical narrative is primarily designed in opposition to Phylarchus and the kind of popular 'tragic' historiography that he represents. But it also constitutes a response to notions and concepts about the cognitive and didactic value of emotions in narratives that ultimately go back to Aristotle. Underlying both the macro (καθόλου) structure (*symploke*) of Polybius' work and his treatment of individual events (κατὰ μέρος) is the idea that the same kind of meaningful interrelations exists between real-life events that Aristotle believed needed to be created artificially, by the author, in a literary plot: causal interrelations between events have an inherent aesthetic property. The historical author's task is to use his special skills (chiefly his *empeiria* and *autopatheia*) not to create any kind of coherence between events and its aesthetic effect but to recognise these pre-existing interrelations correctly and represent them in his narrative. Polybius thus creates a concept of history writing in which causation, visuality, truth and the reader's benefit are closely interrelated: a true historical account has the same aesthetic appeal ('pleasure', *τερπνόν*) as one specifically (and, in the case of Phylarchus, exclusively) designed to elicit such a response. But since it also provides a reliable representation of the events in their complex interrelations, especially causes and

consequences, the visuality that results from such a true account is also useful (ὠφέλιμον). It enables readers to recognise patterns behind past events that allow them to devise courses of actions in their own situations that have a good chance of success.

Polybius' narrative of the career and death of Agathocles in book fifteen of the *Histories* further illustrates these aspects of Polybius' historical thought. Polybius regards the events constituting Agathocles' rise and fall as inherently 'tragic' in the sense that they have no meaningful causal connection but consist entirely of random turns of events (περιπέτεια). Consequently, there is nothing of use that Polybius' envisaged reader, the *aner pragmatikos*, can learn from Agathocles' fate; all it has to offer is the trite and cheap 'shock value' of sudden reversals of fortune, which makes it suitable for tragedy, but not serious historiography.

Polybius' account of the climax of the Agathocles episode, his and his family's gruesome deaths, can therefore be read as a demonstration of how serious (pragmatic, 'universal') historiography should treat stories such as his. Polybius neither attempts to gloss over the inherent lack of meaning of the events nor does he capitalise on their graphic and emotional potential as a 'tragic' historian like Phylarchus might have done. Instead, Polybius' version of the violent deaths of Agathocles and his family implements a different concept of visuality in which graphic elements are used in controlled dosage, as it were, and tempered by elements encouraging a distant, reserved perspective. Emotions thus become themselves the objects of rational analysis as readers are prompted to question, and reflect on, their emotional reactions to the narrative, thus gaining a deeper understanding of the force and danger of emotions both in the past and in their own lives. A 'man of action' (*aner pragmatikos*), they will realise, never allows himself to be carried away by his emotions, neither when reading about history nor when shaping history through his own actions. Any other behaviour is incompatible with his status as a member of the Greek elite. Even the fate of such a paradigmatic anti-man-of-action as Agathocles thus has some important lesson to offer.

Notes

- 1 Davidson (1991). Some important studies drawing on Davidson are Rood (1998, 62–9); Walker (1993); Greenwood (2006, 19–41); cf. also Feldherr (1998).
- 2 Davidson (1991, 11–21).
- 3 Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from Polybius' *Histories* are cited

from the second edition of Büttner-Wobst's *Teubneriana*; translations are from Paton's Loeb, revised by F. Walbank and C. Habicht, mostly adapted.

- 4 Zangara (2007, 41–3, the quote at 41); cf. Marincola (1997, 37); Vattuone (1994, 9); Grethlein (2013, 230).
- 5 Even though Thucydides does not use *synopsis* and its cognates, the idea of providing the reader with a 'synoptic' view, which allows them to 'see not only what different historical agents could see (or not see) in certain situations, but also how these visions affected them' (Greenwood 2006, 42), informs his narrative of the events. In Polybius, what is an implied narrative technique in Thucydides has become an explicit principle of his historical–historiographical method and is no longer applied to individual events only but also to the structure of the past as a whole. Given that Polybius repeatedly appropriates and redefines Thucydidean concepts (cf. nn. 12, 24, 30), it is tempting to see his concept of *synopsis* as informed, consciously or unconsciously, by his reading of his predecessor.
- 6 Zangara (2007, 40–54); Walbank (1972, 68).
- 7 The key terms are κάλλιστον ἅμα δ' ὠφελιμώτατον ('most beautiful and profitable'), 1.4.4; συνιδεῖν ('achieve a comprehensive view'), θεασάμενος ('looking at'), 1.4.6; συνόψεσθαι, θεώμενοι, ἐμψύχου καὶ καλοῦ σώματος ('a body alive and beautiful'), 1.4.7; τῷ τ' εἶδει καὶ τῇ τῆς ψυχῆς εὐπρεπείᾳ ('its form and comeliness of life'), τῆς ἀληθείας ('the truth'), 1.4.8; κατοπτεύσας ('survey from a vantage point'), ἅμα καὶ τὸ χρήσιμον καὶ τὸ τερπνόν ('both benefit and pleasure'), 1.4.11.
- 8 By implication, the authority of Polybius' narrative is based on the presupposition that he alone is able to 'see' the true nature of events; Greenwood (2006, 40) makes a similar point about Thucydides' 'reliable gaze'.
- 9 Cf. Walbank (1972: 67–8); Hoffmann (2002, 207). Polybius is fully aware that his narrative does not simply 'mirror' the past but is the product of conscious authorial intervention that requires not only a special set of skills (12.25h.2–6, describes writing history in terms of an artistic process and the historical narrative as a work of art; cf. n. 30) but also a radical process of selection (at 29.12.6 Polybius calls this τὸν καθήκοντα λόγον ἐκάστοις ἀποδιδόναι, 'giving each event the narrative treatment it deserves').
- 10 On the concrete nature of this usefulness see part one, second section and part two, first section.
- 11 Esp. 1.4.2. Polybius acknowledges that other authors claim to write 'universal history', but accepts only Ephorus as successful in this attempt and, therefore, his only legitimate predecessor in the genre (5.33.1–2). Which aspects of Ephorus' work won Polybius' acceptance is impossible to determine; cf. Mitsios (2013, 10–11 with n. 13); Grethlein (2013, 227).
- 12 Cf. Walbank (1990). The programmatic link between truth, usefulness and pleasure in Polybius' concept of history writing constitutes a deliberate antithesis to Thucydides, who at 1.22.4 equally programmatically opposes truth and usefulness, on the one hand, and pleasure/entertainment (τὸ μῆ) μυσθῶδες), on the other; cf. Plb. 3.31.12; Wiater (forthcoming); nn. 5, 24, 30.
- 13 This aspect of Polybian *synopsis* is ignored by Zangara (2007, 59), who focuses on its 'théorique et abstraite' character. The pleasure of learning about the past might lie behind Polybius' reference to his readers as 'those who delight in learning' (φιλομαθοῦντες, e.g., 1.2.8; 3.1.6). The connection between learning/knowledge, especially the true knowledge provided by philosophy, and pleasure was well established in the philosophical tradition, see Warren (2014), esp. his

discussion of Plat., *Resp.* 582a10–b1 (cf. 581d10–e1; 35), Arist., *Metaph.* 1.1 980a21–2 (note the link between perception, delight and knowledge; 53–4; cf. 60–63), *Rhet.* 1.11 1371a31–b10 (67; cf. 73 on *Po.* 7.1450b34–1451a10) and Epicur., *Sent. Vat.* 27 (81–2).

- 14 Even though direct knowledge of the *Poetics* is unlikely (cf. Ziegler 1952, 1470), Polybius' concept of the interrelation of aesthetics, unity and knowledge echoes Aristotelian ideas; cf. esp. 3.1.4–5 with Arist., *Po.* (ed. Kassel) 23.1459a19 (περὶ μίαν πρᾶξιν ὅλην καὶ τελείαν ἔχουσαν ἀρχὴν καὶ μέσσην καὶ τέλος 'around a single, whole, and complete action, with beginning, middle, and end'), 20–21 (ὥσπερ ζῷον ἐν ὅλῳ ποιῇ τὴν οἰκείαν ἡδονήν 'like a single and whole animal may produce the pleasure proper to it', trans. Halliwell); further, 7.1450b34–51a6 (esp. 51a3–6); Walbank (1957, 297). But Polybius does not simply evoke these ideas for their own sake; he turns 'Aristotle's own weapons against him' (Hartog 2010, 37; cf. Hoffmann 2002, 211) and claims precisely the kind of unity and concomitant aesthetics for both the past itself and his narrative representation of it that Aristotle had denied historiography (23.1459b21–8). He does the same with Thucydidean concepts (p. 206 below; nn. 5, 12, 24, 30, 63).
- 15 Cf. Walbank (1957, 261). Polybius generally holds that speeches in historical works have to be attested as having been pronounced and be authentic in style and content (12.25a.4–5 with Wiater 2014).
- 16 Cf. Walbank (1957, 262); Schepens (2005, 152).
- 17 On *enargeia* see Lausberg (2008, 399–402). Both Polybius' criticism of Phylarchus and his own approach to visuality and emotional response are heavily indebted to that concept; cf. Zangara (2007, 73); Marincola (2013, 81–2). Note, however, that Polybius does not use *enargeia* in the sense of 'visuality' (n. 22).
- 18 On the association of 'falsehood, exaggeration, and invention' with tragedy in Polybius see Marincola (2013, 76–8). On the vexed question of the existence of 'tragic' historiography as a recognised genre see the concise overview in Zangara (2007, 70–73); Marincola (2013). I am here exclusively concerned with Polybius' view of Phylarchus and the characteristics of his narrative, not with any possible implications of his statements for our reconstruction of Hellenistic historiography in general.
- 19 Cf. Eckstein (1989).
- 20 Note the connection between the narration of 'concomitant circumstances' and causal explanation (on which see further below). Cf. further 2.56.10 (τὰ παρεπόμενα τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις 'concomitant circumstances') with 3.31.11–15, esp. 31.11 (τῶν πρότερον καὶ τῶν ἄμα καὶ τῶν ἐπιγινομένων τοῖς ἐργοῖς 'what precedes, what accompanies, and what follows each event') and 1.4.11 (such a comprehensive narrative treatment [ἐκ μέντοι γε τῆς ἀπάντων πρὸς ἀλλήλα συμπλοκῆς καὶ παραθέσεως 'by studying side-by-side all the particulars in their interconnection'; cf. 3.32.5] is both useful **and** pleasurable [ἄμα καὶ τὸ χρήσιμον καὶ τὸ τερπνόν]).
- 21 Cf. 2.56.8 (cited above) with, e.g., 1.1.6, 2.1 (history as θέαμα 'object of perception'), 4.1 (σύνοψιν), 4.6 (συνιδεῖν), 4.11 (κατοπτεύσας); 3.1.4, 1.7, 3.6 (θέντες ὑπὸ τὴν ὄψιν 'bring before our eyes'), 3.9, 9.4 (πρὸς τὰ πράγματα βλέπωσιν 'looking at the events'); cf. Marincola (2013, 82–3, 85); Maier (2012b, 18–26); Davidson (1991); Grethlein (2013, 249–52, esp. 250–51), on 'narrative mimesis'.
- 22 It might be part of this attempt that Polybius never uses *enargeia* in the sense of

the narrative 'vividness' and emotional immediacy that he ascribes to the 'tragic' historians; see *Polybius-Lexikon* s.v. There is no basis for any link between Polybius' 'pragmatic' historiography and Agatharchides of Cnidus' 'pragmatic *enargeia*' (*enargeia pragmatike*, GGM I, 117) as it is postulated, e.g., by Zangara (2007, 75); Sacks (1981, 41).

- 23 See p. 204 above.
- 24 On 3.6.7 see Wiater (forthcoming); on 3.31.11–13, Rood (2010, 151–2), whose conclusion ('Polybius uses Thucydidean criteria against the type of history written by Thucydides himself', 152) describes equally well Polybius' engagement with Phylarchus. Cf. nn. 5, 12, 63.
- 25 Cf. Schepens (2005, 147–8).
- 26 Cf. Marincola (2003; 2013, 80–81); Levene (1997 [2012], esp. 215–16). This crucial aspect is not taken into account sufficiently by Schepens (2005, 162–3).
- 27 Walbank (1957, 263), who argues that 'emotions are legitimate for an historian . . . when the emotion was harnessed to a didactic purpose', has it the wrong way around: any 'didactic purpose' resulting from the emotions aroused by a 'true' historical narrative is the consequence of these emotions' legitimacy, not its precondition.
- 28 At 12.25h.5 Polybius refers to such an 'authentic image' of the past as *emphasis* (ἐμφασις, lit. 'appearance', in the sense of an image as it presents itself to a viewer, but an accurate translation is difficult). As with his other conceptual vocabulary, Polybius has adapted a pre-existing notion to his own needs (cf. Sacks 1981, e.g., 8, 32, 42, 148). In accordance with his merging *res gestae* and *historia rerum gestarum* (p. 204 above), Polybius regards ἐμφασις as a quality inherent in the events (12.25f.4–5) and their narrative representation alike. An 'emphatic' (cf. Pédech 1964, 258: 'un air de vérité', 'un caractère concret') narrative preserves and represents the *emphasis* of the original event. Such a narrative presupposes that the historian has first-hand experience (ἐμπειρία / *empeiria*) of the kind of events he is describing (see esp. 12.25h.2–6; cf. Maier 2012b, 309–14, esp. 309–10 on *empeiria* and the reader's benefit; 310 on *empeiria* and *emphasis*; Sacks 1981, 38, 47).
- 29 See 12.28.3–5; Wiater (2010, 102–3); Maier (2012b, esp. 295–8).
- 30 See esp. 12.25b.2–3 ('the mere statement of a fact may intrigue (ψυχαραγωγῆ) us but is of no benefit (ὠφελεῖ) to us: but when we add the cause of it, study of history becomes fruitful. For it is the transference in our minds of similar circumstances to our own times (ἐκ γὰρ τῶν ὁμοίων ἐπὶ τοὺς οἰκείους μεταφερομένων καιρῶν) that gives us the means of forming presentiments of what is about to happen, and enables us at certain times to take precautions and at others by modelling our own actions on past actions to face with more confidence the difficulties that menace us'). As Maier (2012a) has shown, passages such as this one are not expressions of radical determinism but conceive of the past as a form of guidance that helps readers cope with contingency by minimising (but not eliminating) unpredictability. Polybius' concept of the usefulness and concrete didactic effect of his work is another example of his appropriating important elements of Thucydides' *Histories*; see Rood (2012, 63–4); Wiater (forthcoming); Greenwood (2006, 25, 44–5, 52–3) is excellent on foresight and prediction in Thucydides; see also nn. 5, 12, 24 and 63.
- 31 On this aspect of Polybius' narrative see Davidson (1991).
- 32 The role of historical truth as the link between the two concepts is missed by Walbank (1990, 262); much less should we assume that the useful and the

pleasurable apply to different groups of readers (Marincola 1997, 25).

- 33 See part two, second section for further illustration of how Polybius envisages the relationship of these concepts.
- 34 See n. 14.
- 35 Pace Marincola (2010). Marincola's argument suffers from his premise that an influence of Aristotle presupposes that later writers used Aristotle's concepts and terms in exactly the same way as Aristotle himself. It seems more realistic to envisage a lively intellectual tradition of historians, orators and literary critics (cf. Marincola 2010, 455, 458; 2013, 85–6), who found Aristotle's concepts useful 'to think with' and adopted and adapted them to their own purposes (Ziegler 1952, 1470). An important aspect of Polybius' criticism of Phylarchus that is not obviously connected with concepts used by Aristotle is the connection between Phylarchus' 'verisimilitude' and visuality (and, consequently, the emotional effect caused by this visual quality or 'vividness', *enargeia*, of the narrative). The connection between these two, which Polybius takes for granted, is supplied by Hellenistic theories of *enargeia* that regard both verisimilitude and visuality as depending on the provision of abundant detail and 'concomitant circumstances' (above, p. 206 with n. 20); see, e.g., Demetr., *Eloc.* 209 (*enargeia*, 'vividness', 'comes first from the use of precise detail and from omitting and excluding nothing . . . all accompanying details (πάντα . . . τὰ συμβαίνοντα) are included and nothing is omitted', trans. Innes). Aristotle, by contrast, considers the creation of a vivid mental picture of the events (πρὸ ὁμμάτων τιθέμενον 'in the mind's eye'; ἐναργέστατα ὁρῶν 'seeing things most vividly') only with regard to the author, as a means of 'discover[ing] what is apposite and not miss[ing] contradictions' (Po. 17.1451a21–5, trans. Halliwell), not as an element of the persuasiveness and emotional effect of the work on the recipient.
- 36 Cf. esp. Po. 9.1451a36–1451b11, esp. 1451a36–8: οὐ τὸ τὰ γενόμενα λέγειν, τοῦτο ποιητοῦ ἔργον ἐστίν, ἀλλ' οἷα ἂν γένοιτο καὶ τὰ δυνατὰ κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς ἢ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον ('it is not the poet's function to relate actual events, but the kinds of things that might occur and are possible in terms of probability and necessity'); 14.1453b10–14: οὐ γὰρ πᾶσαν δεῖ ζητεῖν ἡδονὴν ἀπὸ τραγωδίας ἀλλὰ τὴν οἰκείαν . . . τὴν ἀπὸ ἐλέου καὶ φόβου διὰ μιμήσεως δεῖ ἡδονὴν παρασκευάζειν τὸν ποιητὴν ('it is not every pleasure one should seek from tragedy, but the appropriate kind . . . the poet should create the pleasure that comes from pity and fear through mimesis'); 25.1461b11–12: πρὸς τε γὰρ τὴν ποιήσιν αἰρετώτερον πιθανὸν ἀδύνατον ἢ ἀπίθανον καὶ δυνατόν ('Poetic needs make something plausible though impossible preferable to what is possible but implausible', trans. Halliwell).
- 37 See n. 14.
- 38 Cf. Strasburger (1966, 78–87, esp. 83); Halliwell (2002, 289–92, esp. 291) (on mimesis in Duris); cf. Levene (1997 [2012], 214); Schepens (2005, 164).
- 39 Runia 2006, with Grethlein 2012.
- 40 Cf. p. 205–206 above. The view, advanced recently by Schepens (2005, 145–6), that Polybius' polemics against Phylarchus are merely an expression of his alleged 'Achaean bias', implausibly dismisses the fundamental methodological importance of these passages (see Vercruyssen 1990; Schepens 1990).
- 41 But cf. n. 9 on the creative role of the historiographer.
- 42 Cf. Zangara (2007, 56–7, 63–4), who argues provocatively that Polybius' narrative is 'mimetic' in the sense that it enables the reader to experience reality through narrative.

- 43 Cf. Thucydides' claim to his work being the exclusive narrative of the Peloponnesian War because it has literally 'transformed the war into text' (Loraux 1986, 159: 'la guerre muée en texte').
- 44 Sosibius disappears from the narrative after 15.25.7; cf. Walbank (1967, 22–3); Miltisios (2009, 480–81).
- 45 On Agathocles see Huss (2001, 474–86); Barry (1993, 495–7). Further literature in Bollansée (2005, 240 n. 8).
- 46 E.g. Huss (2001, 485 n. 97); Verdin (1990, 453, and the title); Schepens (2005, 163 n. 60), with further references. Dreyer (2011, 81, 106) rightly rejects the view that Polybius ignores his own rejection of 'mimetic' historiography, but his alternative explanation, that the narrative characteristics of this and similar passages reflect Polybius' sources, is equally dissatisfactory.
- 47 See 25.4–10; 22–5; 26.1–9; 27.2–3, 8–29.1; 31.13. In many of these passages the historical agents attempt to manipulate perception in order to gain or preserve their power. Greenwood (2006, 24) notes the prominence of the same pattern of behaviour in Thucydides.
- 48 Grethlein (2013, 262–3) rightly lists it as one of the 'mimetic' passages in Polybius.
- 49 Explained by Barry (1993, 427) as symbolising the victims' criminal status.
- 50 See the index under 'violence' in Richlin (1992).
- 51 Aristotle lists *pathos* as the third core element of the tragic plot, along with *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis*, defining it as 'a destructive or painful action, such as public deaths, physical agony, wounding, etc.' (*Po.* 12.1452b11–3). Verdin (1990, 452) argues that Polybius allows for 'sensational' narrative as long as it is moderate; cf. Bollansée (2005, 249–50).
- 52 Against Grethlein, who opposes didactic effect and 'mimetic' passages (esp. 2013, 266), I would argue that it is precisely through their 'mimetic' quality that such passages can have powerful didactic effects (see below).
- 53 See Walbank (1967, 492, and 33.3).
- 54 See Eckstein 1995, 129–40, esp. 131.
- 55 Cf. Bollansée (2005, 252–3).
- 56 Cf. Champion (2004, 28). It is unlikely that the crowd actually consisted exclusively of native Egyptians (Barry 1993, esp. 419, 422, 429; differently, Fraser 1972, 81–2, 118); this makes it all the more important that Polybius deliberately creates that impression (τῶν κατὰ τὴν Αἴγυπτον ἀνθρώπων, 33.10); cf. Huss (2001, 485 n. 94).
- 57 Oenante's violent death, by contrast, corresponds directly to her earlier insults and threats (29.11–14); cf. Barry (1993, 421).
- 58 Miltisios (2009, 502) notes a similar effect of 3.54.1–3.
- 59 Contrast the tendency of Thucydides' narrative, as Loraux (1986, 150) put it, to make the reader forget the act of narration ('qu'il oublie qu'elle [l'écriture] est un acte').
- 60 On *synopsis* see p. 204 above. Cf. Greenwood (2006, 42) on a similar effect of Thucydides' narrative.
- 61 Greenwood (2006, 24).
- 62 On the association of ὁμότης and barbarian behaviour in particular cf., e.g., D. S. 13.27.6; 30.4. Regarding Polybius' usage of the term and its cognates, Lisa Hau notes that 'Polybius prefers to use ὁμός in its sense of "savage" or

“barbaric” rather than more generically “cruel”; she convincingly reads ὠμότης in the scene discussed here as a warning to the reader that ‘revenge can go too far’ (2016, 67–71).

- 63 Cf. Verdin (1990, 454); p. 207 above with n. 30 on the *Histories* providing readers with reliable knowledge of past situations as guidelines for their own actions and decisions; Greenwood (2006, 24) on history as *didaskalia*, including learning from past mistakes, in Thucydides (specifically 2.87.7).
- 64 Cf. Eckstein (1989, 11–12), with particular reference to the Second Punic War.
- 65 On the importance of the ἀνὴρ πραγματικός being in control of his emotions see Maier (2012b, 316–17 with n. 59; 318 with n. 61).
- 66 The structure of Polybius’ argument is often misunderstood, e.g., by Walbank (1967, 493–4 and *passim*); Verdin (1990, 450).
- 67 ὑπὸ λόγον ἄγειν, for which a TLG search produces only our passage, and translated above as ‘rationalise’ (in the sense of ‘render explicable’), is best understood as the equivalent active expression of ὑπὸ λόγον πίπτειν ‘to be justifiable, explicable’ (Pol. 4.15.11; 8.10.12; ‘unter eine Begründung fallen, sich rechtfertigen lassen’, *Polybios-Lexikon* 329 s.v. πίπτω 2bε; cf. λόγον ἔχειν ‘to make sense, be justified’, 8.10.12). Paton, Walbank and Habicht’s translation ‘take count of’ (if I understand it correctly) does not quite give the right sense; correctly, Drexler, ‘rational erfassen’.
- 68 See Bollansée (2005, 242–5) for a recent discussion.
- 69 See p. 208 above.
- 70 I shall discuss Polybius’ treatment of the *kriegsschuldfrage* and the legal implications of the Second Punic War, including the narratological function of the treaties in Polybius’ narrative, in greater detail in my commentary on *Histories* III, which is under contract with OUP, and a separate study currently in preparation. For a similar narrative strategy in Dionysius of Halicarnassus see N. Wiater, ‘Expertise, “Character” and the “Authority Effect” in the *Early Roman History* of Dionysius of Halicarnassus’, forthcoming in J. König and G. Woolf (eds), *Authority and Expertise in Ancient Scientific Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).
- 71 15.29.7: he ‘so entirely lost his head that he ceased to act in any way and to consider the news he had received’ (οὕτως ἐξέστη τῶν φρενῶν ὥστ’ ἀφήμενος τοῦ πράττειν τι καὶ διανοεῖσθαι περὶ τῶν προσπεπωκότων).
- 72 Cf. Verdin (1990, 450).
- 73 Pace Walbank (1967, 492, on 33.1). See 15.25.7–8 (things ‘just happen’, συνέβη γενέσθαι); 27.10–29.1 (Nicomachus’ sudden departure remains unexplained despite its grave consequences); 29.5 (‘chance’, ταῦτόματον); 33.1 (ἐκ ταῦτομάτου).
- 74 On these terms see Walbank (1967, 41, 411, 494, 495).
- 75 Cf. Bollansée (2005, 245–8); Rood (2007, 171).
- 76 Repetitiveness: συνεχῶς (36.4); ἐγχρωνίζειν, πλεονάκις (36.6); pace Walbank (1967, 496), μήτε καινῶν ὄντων διὰ τὸ καὶ ἐτέροις πρότερον εἰρησθαι (‘matters which are not novel, others having spoken of them before’, 36.10) also belongs here. It does not matter whether one reads about different ἐκπληκτικὰς περιπετείαις (‘shocking reversals of fortune’, 36.2) in one story (such as that of Agathocles) or in many different stories because any narrative based on this commonplace pattern is by definition unoriginal—if you know one, you know them all.

- 77 Cf. Marincola (2013, 84–5).
- 78 Walbank (1967, 493–4).
- 79 Cf. *Po.* 7.1450b24–34; 8.1451a30–34; 9.1452a4–11: plots in which things happen not ‘through chance and fortune’ (ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐτομάτου καὶ τῆς τύχης, 5–6), but ‘seem to have happened by design’ (ὥσπερ ἐξ ἐπίτηδες, 7) are ‘more beautiful’ (καλλίους, 10, trans. Halliwell, adapted).
- 80 The interrelation of these concepts is misunderstood by Walbank (1967, 494).
- 81 Perhaps a reference to Ptolemy of Megalopolis (Walbank 1967, 480, 493).
- 82 I am borrowing this sentence from Paul Auster, *The Locked Room*, 1987, repr. in *The New York Trilogy*, 2011, 219.

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11 Truth and Moralising

The Twin Aims of the Hellenistic Historiographers

Lisa Irene Hau

Since the nineteenth century, uncovering and recording the factual truth of what happened in the past has been the aim of most self-respecting historians.¹ It was long a common assumption that commitment to this particular brand of truth was shared with the ‘good’ ancient historians, i.e. Thucydides and Polybius, but that the truthfulness of most other Greek historiographers was compromised because of love of a good story (Herodotus), political bias (Xenophon), or a preoccupation with rhetoric and moralising (all Hellenistic historiographers apart from Polybius). In recent decades, the degree to which Thucydides was actually living up to this ideal and, indeed, the extent to which he shared it at all, have been brought into question by a number of scholars, and it has become acceptable to say that he was sometimes (e.g. in the Melian Dialogue) engaged in communicating a ‘general’ or ‘higher’ truth—of human nature or of how the world works—rather than a factual truth.² It is also becoming increasingly widely accepted that all historiography, modern as well as ancient, is rhetorical, but that this does not necessarily impact on its truth value.³ Despite these postmodern insights, however, Hellenistic historiography is still routinely assumed to have ‘degenerated’ from a pinnacle of scientific and literary excellence into a ‘rhetorical’ genre concerned primarily with moralising and sensationalism.⁴ It is surely time to look more closely at Hellenistic historiography and ask explicitly what connection, if any, its practitioners saw between their historical endeavour and truth, and how they conceptualised historical truthfulness.

In this paper, we shall focus on the two best preserved works of Hellenistic historiography, Polybius’ *Histories*, which is usually held up as an example of ‘good’ historiography, and Diodorus Siculus’ *Bibliothēke Historikē*, which is usually not. In each case, we shall first examine their programmatic statements in order to see what they have to say about truth and its place in their works; then we shall proceed to look at instances in their works where their practice may be seen to grate against modern notions of truthful history writing.

The overall aim will be to determine what part truth played in Polybius' and Diodorus' understanding of the purpose of their respective works, how they conceptualised this truth, what other purposes they may have had besides, and how these purposes intersect with the purpose of a truthful rendering of past events.

Polybius

It is certainly possible to find passages in Polybius that put truth on a pedestal. The most striking one appears early in Polybius' *Histories*:

ὥσπερ γὰρ ζῶου τῶν ὄψεων ἀφαιρεθεισῶν ἀχρειοῦται τὸ ὅλον, οὕτως ἐξ ἱστορίας ἀνααιρεθείσης τῆς ἀληθείας τὸ καταλειπόμενον αὐτῆς ἀνωφελὲς γίνεται διήγημα.

For just as a living creature which has lost its eyesight is wholly incapacitated, so if History is stripped of her truth all that is left is but an idle tale.

Plb. 1.14.65

Taken on its own, this seems clear-cut, and scholars tend to jump on it eagerly for a confirmation that Polybius was as committed to truth as modern historians.⁶ However, the passage continues:

διόπερ οὔτε τῶν φίλων κατηγορεῖν οὔτε τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ἐπαινεῖν ὀκνητέον, οὔτε δὲ τοὺς αὐτοὺς ψέγειν, ποτὲ δ' ἐγκωμιάζειν εὐλαβητέον, ἐπειδὴ τοὺς ἐν πράγμασιν ἀναστρεφομένους οὐτ' εὐστοχεῖν αἰεὶ δυνατὸν οὐθ' ἁμαρτάνειν συνεχῶς εἰκός. ἀποστάντας οὖν τῶν πραττόντων αὐτοῖς τοῖς πραττομένοις ἐφαρμοστέον τὰς πρεπούσας ἀποφάσεις καὶ διαλήψεις ἐν τοῖς ὑπομνήμασιν.

We should therefore not shrink from accusing our friends or praising our enemies; nor need we be shy of sometimes praising and sometimes blaming the same people, since it is neither possible that men in the actual business of life should always be in the right, nor is it probable that they should be always mistaken. We must therefore *disregard the actors in our narrative and apply to the actions such terms and such criticism as they deserve*.

Plb. 1.14.7–8

It now becomes clear that the truth that is like the eyesight of history is not exclusively a truth of facts, dates and causal connections, but also a truth of praise and blame (ἐπαινεῖν and ψέγειν). The truth here seems to amount to, or at least be closely associated with, objectivity in evaluating the actions of historical characters. A closer look at some other famous Polybian passages concerning truth will show that this is, in fact, generally the case throughout the *Histories*.⁷

The one place where Polybius repeatedly insists that truth is the backbone of history (to use a slightly more contemporary metaphor than eyesight), is in his criticisms of other historians, which fill book twelve of the *Histories*.⁸ The one thing he above all criticises in his predecessors (Timaeus and Callisthenes in particular) is falling short of the truth. A typical passage is 12.4d:

ἐν ᾧ γένει μεγίστην ἐπίφρασιν ἔλκων Τίμαιος πλεῖστον ἀπολείπεσθαι μοι δοκεῖ τῆς ἀληθείας· τοσοῦτο γὰρ ἀπέχει τοῦ δι' ἐτέρων ἀκριβῶς τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἐξετάζειν ὥς οὐδὲ τούτων ὧν αὐτόπτης γέγονε καὶ ἐφ' οὓς αὐτὸς ἦκει τόπους, οὐδὲ περὶ τούτων οὐδὲν ὑγιὲς ἡμῖν ἐξηγείται.

In this respect Timaeus, while making a great parade of accuracy, is, in my opinion, wont to be very short of the truth. So far is he from accurate investigation of the truth by questioning others that not even about matters he has seen with his own eyes and places he has actually visited does he tell us anything trustworthy.

Plb. 12.4d.1–2

It is clear from such passages that truth (ἀλήθεια) is a necessary component of historiography, and that accuracy (ἀκριβεια) forms part of that truth.⁹ In this case truth seems to be what we would recognise as a ‘historical’ truth of facts and topography, which is not connected with praise and blame. However, in amongst the criticisms of mendaciousness or inability to get at the truth, we find numerous criticisms of two further historiographical practices.

First, Polybius repeatedly criticises Timaeus for writing history without having taken part in politics or warfare, and without interviewing eyewitnesses (12.25d–12.25j, 12.26e–28a). This criticism is closely connected with the accusation of mendacity and lack of accuracy: it is simply not possible, according to Polybius, to create a completely truthful account of the past if one is writing about a kind of events one has never taken part in, especially not if one has not even taken the trouble to interview eyewitnesses. This points to a concept of truth as factual accuracy, achieved by a combination of information seeking and informed analysis of the information found.

Secondly, however, Polybius repeatedly criticises both Timaeus and Theopompus for praising and, particularly, blaming either the wrong people or ‘beyond what is fitting’ (12.7.1, 12.12b, 12.15). Polybius clearly believes that praising and criticising is part of the historian’s duty, but that he has to do so objectively, and in a way that is properly instructive. This is also why he repeatedly criticises Timaeus, and once Theopompus, for using undignified language in their criticisms of historical characters (8.11, 12.8, 12.13.1–2, 12.14.2–5,

12.23.1): such language is un-instructive and beneath a historian's dignity. A good example is this passage criticising Theopompus for his sensationalising description of the debauched behaviour of Philip II and his companions:

ταύτην δὲ τὴν τε πικρίαν καὶ τὴν ἀθυρογλωττίαν τοῦ συγγραφέως τίς οὐκ ἂν ἀποδοκιμάσειεν; οὐ γὰρ μόνον ὅτι μαχόμενα λέγει πρὸς τὴν αὐτοῦ πρόθεσιν ἄξιός ἐστιν ἐπιτιμήσεως, ἀλλὰ καὶ διότι κατέψευσται τοῦ τε βασιλέως καὶ τῶν φίλων, καὶ μάλιστα διότι τὸ ψεῦδος αἰσχροῦς καὶ ἀπρεπῶς διατέθεται.

Everyone must disapprove of such bitter feeling and lack of restraint on the part of this writer. For not only does he deserve blame for using language which contradicts his statement of the object he had in writing, but for falsely accusing the king and his friends, and especially for making this false accusation in coarse and unbecoming terms.

Plb. 8.10.1–2

So, according to Polybius, Theopompus was wrong to include such a character-assassinating piece in his history for three reasons: (1) because it contradicted his own initial statement about the worthiness of his topic, (2) because it was untrue, and (3) because he did it in an undignified manner. It is important to note that the actual criticising of a historical character is not considered wrong, only the mistake in who to criticise and the tone of the criticism.

With this in mind, let us now turn to Polybius' preface and see what clues that gives us at the outset of his work about his thoughts on the purpose of history:

εἰ μὲν τοῖς πρὸ ἡμῶν ἀναγράφουσι τὰς πράξεις παραλελειφθαι συνέβαινε τὸν ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς τῆς ἱστορίας ἔπαινον, ἴσως ἀναγκαῖον ἦν τὸ προτρέπεσθαι πάντας πρὸς τὴν αἴρεσιν καὶ παραδοχὴν τῶν τοιούτων ὑπομνημάτων διὰ τὸ μηδεμίαν ἐτοιμοτέραν εἶναι τοῖς ἀνθρώποις διόρθωσιν τῆς τῶν προγεγενημένων πράξεων ἐπιστήμης. [2] ἐπεὶ δ' οὐ τινὲς οὐδ' ἐπὶ ποσόν, ἀλλὰ πάντες ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν ἀρχῇ καὶ τέλει κέχρηται τούτῳ, φάσκοντες ἀληθινωτάτην μὲν εἶναι παιδείαν καὶ γυμνασίαν πρὸς τὰς πολιτικὰς πράξεις τὴν ἐκ τῆς ἱστορίας μάθησιν, ἐναργεστάτην δὲ καὶ μόνην διδάσκαλον τοῦ δύνασθαι τὰς τῆς τύχης μεταβολὰς γενναίως ὑποφέρειν τὴν τῶν ἀλλοτρῶν περιπετειῶν ὑπόμνησιν, [3] δῆλον ὡς οὐδενὶ μὲν ἂν δόξαι καθήκειν περὶ τῶν καλῶς καὶ πολλοῖς εἰρημένων ταυτολογεῖν, ἥκιστα δ' ἡμῖν. [4] αὐτὸ γὰρ τὸ παράδοξον τῶν πράξεων, ὑπὲρ ὧν προηρήμεθα γράφειν, ἱκανόν ἐστι προκαλέσασθαι καὶ παρορμηῖσαι πάντα καὶ νέον καὶ πρεσβύτερον πρὸς τὴν ἐντευξιν τῆς πραγματείας. [5] τίς γὰρ οὕτως ὑπάρχει φαῦλος ἢ ῥάθυμος ἀνθρώπων ὃς οὐκ ἂν βούλοιοτο γινῶναι πῶς καὶ τίνι γένει πολιτείας ἐπικρατηθέντα σχεδὸν ἅπαντα τὰ κατὰ τὴν οἰκουμένην οὐχ ὅλοις πεντήκοντα καὶ τρισὶν ἔτεσιν ὑπὸ μίαν ἀρχὴν ἔπεσε τὴν Ῥωμαίων, ὃ πρότερον οὐχ εὐρίσκεται γεγονός, [6] τίς δὲ πάλιν οὕτως ἐκπαθὴς πρὸς τι τῶν ἄλλων θεαμάτων ἢ μαθημάτων ὃς προυργαίτερον ἂν

Had previous chroniclers neglected to speak in praise of History in general, it might perhaps have been necessary for me to recommend everyone to choose for study and welcome such treatises as the present, since men have no more ready corrective of conduct than knowledge of the past. [2] But all historians, one may say without exception, and in no half-hearted manner, but making this the beginning and end of their labour, have impressed on us that the soundest education and training for a life of active politics is the study of History, and that the surest and indeed the only method of learning how to bear bravely the vicissitudes of fortune, is to recall the calamities of others. [3] Evidently therefore no one, and least of all myself, would think it his duty at this day to repeat what has been so well and so often said. [4] For the very element of unexpectedness in the events I have chosen as my theme will be sufficient to challenge and incite everyone, young and old alike, to peruse my systematic history. [5] For who is so worthless or indolent as not to wish to know by what means and under what system of polity the Romans in less than fifty-three years have succeeded in subjecting nearly the whole inhabited world to their sole government—a thing unique in history? [6] Or who again is there so passionately devoted to other spectacles or studies as to regard anything as of greater moment than the acquisition of this knowledge?

P1b. 1.1

The first remarkable thing about Polybius' preface is that it is so obviously written as part of a tradition: the function of the *praeteritio* of the first sentence is to show that this author is doing the same thing as a long venerable row of historians before him. And what he is doing is writing history as a 'ready corrective of conduct'. According to Polybius' preface, historiography is 'the soundest education and training for a life of active politics' (παιδείαν καὶ γυμνασίαν πρὸς τὰς πολιτικὰς πράξεις) and 'the only method of learning how to bear bravely the vicissitudes of fortune' (μόνην διδάσκαλον τοῦ δύνασθαι τὰς τῆς τύχης μεταβολὰς γενναίως, 1.1.2). It is worth pausing for a moment to emphasise this: the purpose of historiography is predominantly didactic, and this didacticism has both a practical dimension, i.e. to prepare readers for political life, and a moral dimension, i.e. to teach them how to bear changing fortunes with dignity.

Then, in 1.1.5, Polybius offers the topic of his *Histories*: to explain 'by what means and under what system of polity the Romans in less than fifty-three years have succeeded in subjecting nearly the whole inhabited world to their sole government.' This is clearly a question of uncovering the causes of historical events, which is still today a respectable goal of the discipline of History; but after the first four sections of the preface we can only expect that this explanation will also aim at being didactically useful.

Truth is not mentioned in the preface. In the light of the passages discussed above from elsewhere in the work, we cannot doubt that Polybius intended his didactically useful uncovering of causes to be a truthful one; but this is never stated in the preface, only implied. This is significant, because it must mean that, in the middle of the second century BC, when Polybius was writing, truth was accepted as the necessary standard of history to such a degree that it did not need to be insisted upon at the outset, like Thucydides had. This gives the Hellenistic historiographers a freedom to focus on other features that they consider important for good history writing, and the main one—for Polybius at least—was clearly didacticism.

The third and final place to look for Polybius' ideas about the purpose of history is his 'Second Preface'. This comes at the beginning of book three and his history proper, after his prefatory treatment of the First Punic War. Here he first reiterates his purpose of narrating 'the how, when, and wherefore of the subjection of the known parts of the world to the dominion of Rome' (τοῦ πῶς καὶ πότε καὶ διὰ τί πάντα τὰ γνωριζόμενα μέρη τῆς οἰκουμένης ὑπὸ τὴν Ῥωμαίων δυναστείαν ἐγένετο, 3.1.4); then he gives a summary of the rest of the work, which he says will be 'useful' (χρήσιμον, 3.1.5). After the summary follows a much-discussed chapter explaining the decision to carry on his work beyond 167 BC. It begins with the revealing words:

εἰ μὲν οὖν ἐξ αὐτῶν τῶν κατορθωμάτων ἢ καὶ τῶν ἐλαττωμάτων ἱκανὴν ἐνεδέχετο ποιήσασθαι τὴν διάληψιν ὑπὲρ τῶν ψεκτῶν ἢ τοῦναντίον ἐπαινετῶν ἀνδρῶν καὶ πολιτευμάτων, ἐνθάδε που λήγειν ἂν ἡμᾶς ἔδει . . .

Now if from their success or failure alone we could form an adequate judgement of how far states and individuals are worthy of praise or blame, I could here lay down my pen . . .

Plb. 3.4.1

Polybius' purpose, then, even here, is not just to explain 'how and by means of what constitution' Rome acquired world domination, but also to help his readers decide which of the characters and states he writes about deserve criticism (τῶν ψεκτῶν), and which praise (ἐπαινετῶν). This purpose underlies the entire chapter. At the end of the passage, Polybius comes back to the higher purpose of helping readers form such judgements: his work is supposed to be useful—indeed, the fact that it will help readers make up their minds about how to morally judge Roman rule is the work's chief claim to usefulness (τὸ γὰρ ὠφέλιμον . . . πλεῖστον, 3.4.7). The purpose of history, again, is to be of didactic use, and it fulfils this purpose partly by passing 'truthful', i.e. objective, moral judgement on historical

characters and states.

It is clear that Polybius does not see a contrast between truth and moral didacticism, but rather sees them as two sides of the same coin. For him, good history writing needed to do two things: (1) it needed to be useful, and to be useful by means of *paradeigmata*, including praise and criticism of historical characters, thus providing both moral and practical instruction;¹⁰ and (2) it needed to uncover and present the truth about the past, and especially about the causal connections between events. Polybius seems to have considered these two purposes as intimately interlinked: a truthful history for him was a history that made sure to provide honest, objective and useful *paradeigmata*.

This conclusion is supported by one of the most discussed passages of Polybius' *Histories*, namely his vicious attack on his predecessor Phylarchus (2.56–63).¹¹ Here Polybius criticises Phylarchus for narrating the Achaean sack of Mantinea in an overly emotional way, adding fictitious circumstantial details in order to excite and shock his readers. Polybius goes on to establish truth and utility as the key features of historiography (τάληθές διὰ τὴν ὠφέλειαν τῶν φιλομαθοῦντων, 2.56.12) and to argue that these are best served by an investigation of the causes and motives behind events (αἰτίαν καὶ τρόπον τοῖς γινομένοις, 2.56.13). If this sounds reassuring to a twenty-first-century reader, she is disappointed when she continues her reading and discovers that Polybius spends the next two chapters (2.57–8) polemicising against Phylarchus' account on the basis not of sound causal investigation, but of political bias: Polybius came from a family that was part of the leading circles of the Achaean League, and he was not prepared to admit that their sacking of Mantinea was anything but a just act. This clearly does not mean that the Mantineans did not suffer during the attack (although Polybius claims that they suffered less than Phylarchus would have it), but only that, to Polybius' mind, they deserved this suffering (2.58.9–12).¹² For that reason, making the readers emotionally engaged in the suffering and therefore sympathetic to the sufferers would not be morally beneficial.

This is a revealing position. Although Polybius begins with criticising Phylarchus for adding untruthful details, he ends with criticising him for including un-instructive information. One has to wonder if Phylarchus was making things up at all, or if he simply told it as it was, with all the harrowing details that were surely part of every attack on a city. However that may be, it is certainly clear that Polybius is, again, conflating truth and didacticism.

For present-day readers, steeped in a Positivist ideal of non-biased, non-moralising historiography, it now becomes a pressing question whether Polybius' commitment to didacticism ever compromised his commitment to factual truth, the way his political bias may have done in his criticism of Phylarchus. Was Polybius ever guilty of making up circumstantial details in order to make a didactic point? This question is probably impossible to answer on the basis of our source material. Polybius certainly never engages in detailed descriptions of atrocities in the way that Phylarchus seems to have done, and in general there are few circumstantial details in his surviving narrative. In a few places, however, his narrative does slow down and dwell at length on events and actions that would take up much less space, if any at all, in a modern work of history. One such passage is his narrative of the actions of Scipio Africanus the Elder after the taking of Cartagena in 210 BC (10.16–20).¹³ In this passage, the reader hears in detail about Scipio's efforts to divide booty equally among his soldiers (10.16), which occasions a short digression on the general greed of humankind that victorious commanders must counter (10.17.1–5). Polybius then goes on to give a detailed account of Scipio's humane treatment of his Spanish prisoners (10.17.6–14), with circumstantial and emotional details such as the prisoners' tears of gratitude (10.17.8), which culminates in a moralising statement about the practical benefits this generous behaviour brought for Scipio himself (10.15–16). Thirdly, he offers a detailed narrative of Scipio's equally humane treatment of the Iberian hostages of the Carthaginians (10.18–19), crowned with two scenes with direct speech in which Scipio first saves the daughters of an Iberian chieftain from sexual abuse by taking them under his protection (10.18.7–15), then returns a beautiful female prisoner given to him by his men to her father (10.19.1–7). In a twenty-first-century work of history these actions of Scipio would most likely be reduced to a single sentence along the lines of, 'He treated his Spanish prisoners humanely and thereby won their loyalty for Rome', but for Polybius this is not enough. The moral-didactic nature of his work means that Scipio's exemplary behaviour in Spain must be given as much space as its practical consequences. This is how a victorious general should behave, and Polybius is keen to give as many details as possible. Are these details all true? Did Polybius know for certain that the freed prisoners cried? Did he know what the captive wife of the Iberian chieftain said to Scipio in order to make him aware of the danger that threatened her daughters? These are questions we cannot answer, but if Polybius made such details up, he did it in order to create a more emotionally engaging, and therefore more memorable and useful, moral *paradeigma*.¹⁴ In these passages he is aiming not for the factual, but for the moral truth.

On this note, let us now turn to look at one of Polybius' admirers and successors, Diodorus Siculus.

Diodorus Siculus

Diodorus Siculus is not a very well-respected historian. He is often said to have reproduced his sources unthinkingly and has been accused of various unflattering qualities such as sloppiness and stupidity.¹⁵ He is interesting for our purposes, however, because, regardless of whether or not his historiographical practice lived up to it, he presents himself as a serious historian walking in the footsteps of other serious historians.¹⁶ This means that he claims to follow the ideals of 'proper history' as they were established at his time of writing, i.e. in the first century BC. For this reason his extensive preface is a treasure trove of information about the state of the genre, or discipline, at the end of the Hellenistic era. It stretches over no fewer than nine and a half Loeb pages and praises the practice of history writing with extravagant exuberance.

The preface begins with the statement that we all owe a debt of gratitude to authors of (universal)¹⁷ history because such works provide 'risk-free training' (ἀκίνδυνον διδασκαλίαν) in 'what is useful' (τοῦ συμφέροντος) by means of describing the failures and successes of others (1.1.1–2); that is, it has a purely didactic purpose. Diodorus goes on to praise universal history for bringing knowledge about the entire world together in one work (1.1.3–4), and then gives as his reason for this praise the fact that such a wide collection of examples of behaviour (παράδειγματα) is of the greatest use for the 'correction' (διόρθωσις) of the reader's own behaviour (1.1.4–5), echoing Polybius' preface and bringing us back again to the purpose of instruction. The chapter finishes with an eloquent eulogy of history: it 'endows the young with the wisdom of the aged', multiplies the experience of the old, makes citizens qualified for leadership and incites leaders to all sorts of noble actions, because it memorialises good deeds (1.1.5). Thus, historiography not only provides instruction, but also functions as a memorial for good men and a lasting shame for bad ones, and, by the inspiration that this memorial provides, as a teacher of the living. At this point we are two and a half Loeb pages into the preface, and there is still no mention of truth, only of practical and moral instruction and memorialisation.

In chapter two, we are told that it is because of the inspiration gained from reading historiography that men have founded cities, written law-codes, and invented new knowledges and skills for the

good of mankind (1.2.1). This endows history writing with an impressively inspirational purpose, although not necessarily a truth-telling one. But then truth finally gets a look in:

εἰ γὰρ ἡ τὸν ἐν ᾧδου μυθολογία τὴν ὑπόθεσιν πεπλασμένην ἔχουσα πολλὰ συμβάλλεται τοῖς ἀνθρώποις πρὸς εὐσέβειαν καὶ δικαιοσύνην, πόσω μᾶλλον ὑποληπτέον τὴν προφήτιν τῆς ἀληθείας ἱστορίαν, τῆς ὅλης φιλοσοφίας οἶονεῖ μητρόπολιν οὔσαν, ἐπισκευάσαι δύνασθαι τὰ ἥθη μᾶλλον πρὸς καλοκάγαθίαν;

For if it be true that the myths which are related about Hades, in spite of the fact that their subject-matter is fictitious, contribute greatly to fostering piety and justice among men, how much more must we assume that history, the propheticess of truth, she who is, as it were, the mother-city of philosophy as a whole, is still more potent to equip men's characters for noble living!

D. S. 1.2.2¹⁸

On the one hand, this is a definite linkage between history and truth. History is grandiosely called the προφήτις of truth, that is, the proclaimer or perhaps, more interestingly, the interpreter of truth, in the same way that the Pythia is the interpreter of Apollo. We get a sense of the hyperbole when we notice that the statement is paired with history being the 'mother-city of philosophy as a whole'. However, the comparison with the myths about Hades undermines this slightly: these myths are apparently didactically efficient despite the fact that they are made up, and historiography, being true, can be expected to have a similar effect, only on a grander scale—that is, the difference between truth and fiction seems to be one of degree rather than quality.

Things become even less clear-cut when Diodorus adds a γάρ clause to explain why truth-interpreting history is so effective. It is effective because the only way to live forever is to have one's fame for *aretē* extolled by historiography (1.2.3). This is a memorialising function of historiography, and if this memorialising is the reason why historiography inspires men to good deeds in the same way as the threat of a dire afterlife, it is not hard to imagine how historiography could fulfil this function just as well—perhaps sometimes even better—if the truth was embellished, or interpreted in a favourable light, rather than told straight out. While truth and moral didacticism do not apparently exclude one another, neither are they entirely mutually supportive.

There is only one further mention of truth in the preface. After the quoted passage and its γάρ clause Diodorus goes on to elaborate on the memorialising function of historiography as the reward accorded

to great men after their death (1.2.4–5), and then he argues that historiography increases the power of λόγος, which here seems to mean both ‘speech’ and ‘rational thought’ as well as ‘literature’ (1.2.6). In 1.2.7 he then compares historiography with other literary genres:

εἰς πλείω δὲ μέρη τούτου διηρημένου, συμβαίνει τὴν μὲν ποιητικὴν τέρπειν μᾶλλον ἢ περ ὠφελεῖν, τὴν δὲ νομοθεσίαν κολάζειν, οὐ διδάσκειν, παραπλησίως δὲ καὶ τᾶλλα μέρη τὰ μὲν μηδὲν συμβάλλεσθαι πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν, τὰ δὲ μεμιγμένην ἔχειν τῷ συμφέροντι τὴν βλάβην, ἔνια δὲ κατεψεῦσθαι τῆς ἀληθείας, μόνην δὲ τὴν ἱστορίαν, συμφωνούντων ἐν αὐτῇ τῶν λόγων τοῖς ἔργοις, ἅπαντα τᾶλλα χρήσιμα τῇ γραφῇ περιειληφέναι· ὁρᾶσθαι γὰρ αὐτὴν προτρεπομένην ἐπὶ δικαιοσύνην, κατηγοροῦσαν τῶν φαύλων, ἐγκωμιάζουσαν τοὺς ἀγαθοὺς, τὸ σύνολον ἐμπειρίαν μεγίστην περιποιῶσαν τοῖς ἐντυγχάνουσι.

And when speech is resolved into its several kinds, we find that, whereas poetry is more pleasing than profitable, and codes of law punish but do not instruct, and similarly, all the other kinds either contribute nothing to happiness or else contain a harmful element mingled with the beneficial, while some of them actually pervert the truth, history alone, since in it word and fact are in perfect agreement, embraces in its narration all the other qualities as well that are useful; for it is ever to be seen urging men to justice, denouncing those who are evil, lauding the good, laying up, in a word, for its readers a mighty store of experience.

D. S. 1.2.7–8

Here we see truth being extolled as the particular quality of historiography over other kinds of writings, and in the next breath this truth seems to be equated with a positive moral didacticism. If this is part of historiography’s truth value, it is a different kind of truth from the one we have come to regard as true since the nineteenth century: it is not a truth consisting of facts, dates and uncovered causality, but a truth consisting of correct and instructive moral evaluations of the behaviour of historical people. In fact, Diodorus seems to equate truthfulness with moral instructiveness to an even higher degree than Polybius.

It is also interesting that Diodorus, in the quoted passage, claims that historiography, as the only literary genre, offers ‘perfect agreement’, συμφωνία, between the narrative and the events it describes. This may strike us as naive, living as we do in a post-Hayden White world, where we know very well that no work of historiography is simply a clear window onto the past. But Diodorus was clearly not a postmodernist, and it is worth speculating for a moment about what he might mean by this. Is he claiming a particularly mimetic quality for historiography? Or is it simply

another way of saying that history praises and blames the right people, which is what makes it useful? We may get a clue to what he means in a later passage, and we shall come back to it then.

To continue our analysis of Diodorus' preface: in 1.3 he explicitly establishes his own project (1.3.1–5). He reiterates the superiority of universal history to historiographical monographs, again repeatedly in terms of usefulness (τὸ σύμφερον 1.3.1, τῆς ὠφελείας 1.3.2, εὐχρηστοτάτην 1.3.6), and states that 'the benefit for readers lies in being able to take the greatest number and most varied circumstances' (κειμένης γὰρ τοῖς ἀναγινώσκουσι τῆς ὠφελείας ἐν τῷ πλείστας καὶ ποικιλωτάτας περιστάσεις λαμβάνειν) and that 'from this work it will be possible for each reader to take with ease what is useful in his own situation, just as if drawing from a large spring' (ἐξέσται γὰρ ἐκ ταύτης ἕκαστον πρὸς τὴν ἰδίαν ὑπόστασιν ἐτοίμως λαμβάνειν τὸ χρήσιμον, ὥσπερ ἐκ μεγάλης ἀρυόμενον πηγῆς). Finally, he describes the toil and hardship he has gone through to compose the work (1.4.1–5) and gives a table of contents for the work as a whole (1.4.5–1.5). Truth is not mentioned again, and the overall feeling the reader is left with is that the success of a given work of historiography is measured in no way by its adherence to truthfulness, but only by the usefulness of its moral–didactic *exempla*.

If we search for manifestos of truthfulness in the rest of Diodorus' *Bibliothēke*, we are disappointed. His surviving programmatic statements fall largely in the prefaces to individual books, but none of them mentions truth.¹⁹ A few discuss issues such as the inclusion of prefaces and speeches in historiography,²⁰ but without mentioning the issue of truthfulness, and most offer a moral–didactic interpretation of the events to be narrated in the following book without being programmatic.²¹ Only the prefaces to books four and fifteen relate to the purpose of the *Bibliothēke*, and they both express it exclusively in terms of moral didacticism.

The preface to book four faces the biggest problem a modern reader has with accepting Diodorus' *Bibliothēke* as historical truth, namely his inclusion of six books of mythological material. This makes this particular preface worth examining in more detail, and for that we need to read it in full:

οὐκ ἄγνοω μὲν ὅτι τοῖς τὰς παλαιὰς μυθολογίας συνταττομένοις συμβαίνει κατὰ τὴν γραφὴν ἐν πολλοῖς ἐλαττοῦσθαι. ἡ μὲν γὰρ τῶν ἀναγραφόμενων ἀρχαιότης δυσεύρετος οὕσα πολλὴν ἀπορίαν παρέχεται τοῖς γράφουσιν, ἡ δὲ τῶν χρόνων ἀπαγγελία τὸν ἀκριβέστατον ἐλέγχον οὐ προοδεχομένη καταφρονεῖν ποιεῖ τῆς ἰστορίας τοὺς ἀναγινώσκοντας πρὸς δὲ τοῦτοις ἡ ποικιλία καὶ τὸ πλῆθος τῶν γενεαλογουμένων ἡρώων τε καὶ ἡμιθέων καὶ

τῶν ἄλλων ἀνδρῶν δυσέφικτον ἔχει τὴν ἀπαγγελίαν· τὸ δὲ μέγιστον καὶ πάντων ἀτοπώτατον, ὅτι συμβαίνει τοὺς ἀναγεγραφóτας τὰς ἀρχαιοτάτας πράξεις τε καὶ μυθολογίας ἀσυμφώνους εἶναι πρὸς ἀλλήλους. [2] διόπερ τῶν μεταγενεστέρων ἱστοριογράφων οἱ πρωτεύοντες τῇ δόξῃ τῆς μὲν ἀρχαίας μυθολογίας ἀπέστησαν διὰ τὴν δυσχέρειαν, τὰς δὲ νεωτέρας πράξεις ἀναγράφειν ἐπεχείρησαν. [3] Ἐφορος μὲν γὰρ ὁ Κυμαῖος, Ἰσοκράτους ὦν μαθητῆς, ὑποστησάμενος γράφειν τὰς κοινὰς πράξεις, τὰς μὲν παλαιὰς μυθολογίας ὑπερέβη, τὰ δ' ἀπὸ τῆς Ἡρακλειδῶν καθόδου πραχθέντα συνταξάμενος ταύτην ἀρχὴν ἐποιήσατο τῆς ἱστορίας. ὁμοίως δὲ τούτῳ Καλλισθένης καὶ Θεόπομπος, κατὰ τὴν αὐτὴν ἡλικίαν γεγονότες, ἀπέστησαν τῶν παλαιῶν μύθων. [4] ἡμεῖς δὲ τὴν ἐναντίαν τούτοις κρίσιν ἔχοντες, καὶ τὸν ἐκ τῆς ἀναγραφῆς πόνον ὑποστάντες, τὴν πᾶσαν ἐπιμέλειαν ἐποιησάμεθα τῆς ἀρχαιολογίας. μέγισται γὰρ καὶ πλεῖστοι συνετελέσθησαν πράξεις ὑπὸ τῶν ἡρώων τε καὶ ἡμιθέων καὶ πολλῶν ἄλλων ἀνδρῶν ἀγαθῶν· ὧν διὰ τὰς κοινὰς εὐεργεσίας οἱ μεταγενέστεροι τοὺς μὲν ἰσοθέοις, τοὺς δ' ἡρωικαῖς θυσίαις ἐτίμησαν, πάντας δ' ὁ τῆς ἱστορίας λόγος τοῖς καθήκουσιν ἐπαίνοις εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα καθύμνησεν.

I am not unaware of the fact that those who compile the narratives of ancient mythology labour under many disadvantages in their composition. For, in the first place, the antiquity of the events they have to record, since it makes record difficult, is a cause of much perplexity to those who would compose an account of them; and again, inasmuch as any pronouncement they may make of the dates of events does not admit of the strictest kind of proof or disproof, a feeling of contempt for the narration is aroused in the mind of those who read it; furthermore, the variety and the multitude of the heroes, demi-gods, and men in general whose genealogies must be set down make their recital a difficult thing to achieve; but the greatest and most disconcerting obstacle of all consists in the fact that those who have recorded the deeds and myths of the earliest times are in disagreement among themselves. [2] For these reasons the writers of greatest reputation among the later historians have stood aloof from the narration of the ancient mythology because of its difficulty, and have undertaken to record only the more recent events. [3] Ephorus of Cyme, for instance, a pupil of Isocrates, when he undertook to write his universal history, passed over the tales of the old mythology and commenced his history with a narration of the events which took place after the Return of the Heracleidae. Likewise Callisthenes and Theopompus, who were contemporaries of Ephorus, held aloof from the old myths. [4] We, however, holding the opposite opinion to theirs, have shouldered the labour which such a record involves and have expended all the care within our power upon the ancient legends. For very great and most numerous deeds have been performed by the heroes and demi-gods and by many good men likewise, who, because of the benefits they conferred which have been shared by all men, have been honoured by succeeding generations with sacrifices which in some cases are like those offered to the gods, in other cases like such as are paid to heroes, and of one and all the appropriate praises have been sung by the voice of history for all time.

D. S. 4.1

In this passage Diodorus lists several problems that face a historian wanting to include the mythical period in his work: first, the sheer antiquity of the events makes it difficult to acquire knowledge of them

and means that the dating of events cannot be properly evidenced (τὸν ἀκριβέστατον ἔλεγχον). Secondly, the number and variety of mythological characters make it difficult to create a narrative; and thirdly, the authorities disagree on many particulars (4.1.1). It is because of these difficulties, Diodorus claims, that great historians of the past have often ignored the mythical period and dealt only with historical time (4.1.2–3).

What is interesting from the point of view of our investigation is that, if we unpack the criterion for success underlying the definition of these difficulties—chronological distance, multitude of subjects, disagreement between sources—then that criterion must be the search for historical truth: if Diodorus did not care about creating a true account, these obstacles would not be obstacles at all. The fact that truth is never mentioned in the passage must mean, then, that he takes this aim for granted and expects his readers to do so too. It seems, after all, that truth had been established as the agreed goal of historiography by the first century BC.

Again, however, Diodorus seems to think about this truth that he aims for in a slightly different way from twenty-first-century historians. After listing the historians who have ignored the mythical period, he sets out his own project (4.1.4): ‘We, however, holding the opposite opinion to theirs, have shouldered the labour which such a record involves and have expended all the care within our power (τὴν πᾶσαν ἐπιμέλειαν) upon the ancient legends (τῆς ἀρχαιολογίας).’ In the next sentence he gives his reason for this, namely that the heroes, demi-gods and men of myth have performed such great benefactions to humankind that we owe them on the one hand religious sacrifices and on the other hand praise in historiography. Strikingly, the sacrifices and the historiographical praise are set up as parallels, thereby making historiography not only a memorial of good deeds, but also a way of worshipping the doers of the deeds.

In this way Diodorus claims an additional purpose for historiography beside the truth that we understood from the previous section. If the purpose of historiography is memorialising and worshipping those who have done good deeds, then the inclusion of mythical material is entirely appropriate. And instead of ἀλήθεια (truth) and ἀκρίβεια (exactness), the watchwords of Thucydides and Polybius, what he offers is ἡ πᾶσα ἐπιμέλεια, ‘the greatest care’.

The impression gained from this passage is strengthened by a very similar passage a couple of chapters later, where Diodorus justifies his inclusion of the story of Heracles’ labours:

οὐκ ἀγνοῶ δ' ὅτι πολλά δύσχρηστα συμβαίνει τοῖς ἱστοροῦσι τὰς παλαιὰς μυθολογίας, καὶ μάλιστα τὰς περὶ Ἡρακλέους. τῷ μὲν γὰρ μεγέθει τῶν κατεργασθέντων ὁμολογουμένως οὗτος παραδέδοται πάντας τοὺς ἐξ αἰῶνος ὑπερᾶραι τῇ μνήμῃ παραδοθέντας· δυσέφικτον οὖν ἐστὶ τὸ κατὰ τὴν ἀξίαν ἕκαστον τῶν πραχθέντων ἀπαγγεῖλαι καὶ τὸν λόγον ἐξιῶσαι τοῖς τηλικούτοις ἔργοις, οἷς διὰ τὸ μέγεθος ἔπαθλον ἦν ἡ ἀθανασία. [2] διὰ δὲ τὴν παλαιότητα καὶ τὸ παράδοξον τῶν ἱστορουμένων παρὰ πολλοῖς ἀπιστουμένων τῶν μύθων, ἀναγκαῖον ἢ παραλιπόντας τὰ μέγιστα τῶν πραχθέντων καθαιρεῖν τι τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ δόξης ἢ πάντα διεξιόντας τὴν ἱστορίαν ποιεῖν ἀπιστουμένην. [3] ἐνιοὶ γὰρ τῶν ἀναγινωσκόντων οὐ δικαίᾳ χρώμενοι κρίσει τάκριβες ἐπιζητοῦσιν ἐν ταῖς ἀρχαίαις μυθολογίαις ἐπ' ἴσης τοῖς πραττομένοις ἐν τοῖς καθ' ἡμᾶς χρόνοις, καὶ τὰ δισταζόμενα τῶν ἔργων διὰ τὸ μέγεθος ἐκ τοῦ καθ' αὐτοὺς βίου τεκμαριόμενοι, τὴν Ἡρακλέους δύναμιν ἐκ τῆς ἀσθενείας τῶν νῦν ἀνθρώπων θεωροῦσιν, ὥστε διὰ τὴν ὑπερβολὴν τοῦ μεγέθους τῶν ἔργων ἀπιστεῖσθαι τὴν γραφὴν. [4] καθόλου μὲν γὰρ ἐν ταῖς μυθολογουμέναις ἱστορίαις οὐκ ἐκ παντὸς τρόπου πικρῶς τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἐξεταστέον. καὶ γὰρ ἐν τοῖς θεάτροις, πεπεισμένοι μῆτε Κενταύρους διφυεῖς ἐξ ἑτερογενῶν σωμάτων ὑπάρχει μῆτε Γηρυσίνην τρισώματον, ὅμως προσδεχόμεθα τὰς τοιαύτας μυθολογίας, καὶ ταῖς ἐπισημασίαις συναύξομεν τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ τιμὴν. [5] καὶ γὰρ ἄτοπον Ἡρακλέα μὲν ἔτι κατ' ἀνθρώπους ὄντα τοῖς ἰδίους πόνοις ἐξημερῶσαι τὴν οἰκουμένην, τοὺς δ' ἀνθρώπους ἐπιλαθομένους τῆς κοινῆς εὐεργεσίας συκοφαντεῖν τὸν ἐπὶ τοῖς καλλίστοις ἔργοις ἔπαινον, καὶ τοὺς μὲν προγόνους διὰ τὴν ὑπερβολὴν τῆς ἀρετῆς ὁμολογουμένην αὐτῷ συγχωρῆσαι τὴν ἀθανασίαν, ἡμᾶς δὲ πρὸς τὸν θεὸν μηδὲ τὴν πατροπαράδοτον εὐσέβειαν διαφυλάττειν.

I am not unaware that many difficulties beset those who undertake to give an account of the ancient myths, and especially is this true with respect to the myths about Heracles. For as regards the magnitude of the deeds which he accomplished it is generally agreed that Heracles has been handed down as one who surpassed all men of whom memory from the beginning of time has brought down an account; consequently it is a difficult attainment to report each one of his deeds in a worthy manner and to present a record which shall be on a level with labours so great, the magnitude of which won for him the prize of immortality. [2] Furthermore, since in the eyes of many men the very early age and astonishing nature of the facts which are related make the myths incredible, a writer is under the necessity either of omitting the greatest deeds and so detracting somewhat from the fame of the god, or of recounting them all and in so doing making the history of them incredible. [3] For some readers set up an unfair standard and require in the accounts of the ancient myths the same exactness as in the events of our own time, and using their own life as a standard they pass judgment on those deeds, the magnitude of which throw them open to doubt, and estimate the might of Heracles by the weakness of the men of our day, with the result that the exceeding magnitude of his deeds makes the account of them incredible. [4] For, speaking generally, when the histories of myths are concerned, a man should by no means scrutinize the truth with so sharp an eye. In the theatres, for instance, though we are persuaded there have existed no Centaurs who are composed of two different kinds of bodies nor any Geryones with three bodies, we yet look with favour upon such products of the myths as these, and by our applause we enhance the honour of the god. [5] And strange it would be indeed that Heracles while yet among mortal men, should by his own labours have brought under cultivation the inhabited world, and that human beings should nevertheless forget the

benefactions which he rendered them generally and slander the commendation he receives for the noblest deeds, and strange that our ancestors should have unanimously accorded immortality to him because of his exceedingly great attainments, and that we should nevertheless fail to cherish and maintain for the god the pious devotion which has been handed down to us from our fathers.

D. S. 4.8

This time an additional difficulty for the historian consists in making the narrative equal the magnificence of the events (τὸν λόγον ἐξισῶσαι τοῖς τηλικούτοις ἔργοις, οἷς διὰ τὸ μέγεθος ἔπαθλον ἦν ἡ ἄθανασία, 4.8.1). Now, this correspondence between the words of the narrative and the deeds they narrate may well be part of the *symphonia* we saw Diodorus advocating above, between the narrative and the deeds narrated. As we read further in this particular passage, however, it seems that Diodorus is not just referring to the truthfulness of the account, or even the mimetic quality of the account—rather he seems to believe that he has a duty to honour and worship Heracles in words that somehow live up to the hero's great deeds (D. S. 4.8.1).

In section two Diodorus repeats some of the sentiments from his introduction to book four: readers will disbelieve the narrative because of the antiquity of the events narrated, as well as their incredible nature. 'For', he then says in 4.8.3, 'some readers set up an unfair standard (οὐ δικάϊα χρώμενοι κρίσει) and require in the accounts of the ancient myths the same exactness (τάκριβες ἐπ' ἴσης) as in the events of our own time' and 'estimate the might of Heracles by the weakness of the men of our day' (4.8.3). And then comes the crucial statement: 'when the histories of myths are concerned, a man should by no means scrutinize the truth with so sharp an eye (ἐν ταῖς μυθολογουμέναις ἱστορίαις οὐκ ἐκ παντὸς τρόπου πικρῶς τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἐξεταστέον)'—we should rather accept the mythological narratives the way that we accept mythical creatures on stage (4.8.4). Finally, in 4.8.5, he states that it would be absurd (ἄτοπον) if human beings should forget the benefactions bestowed on them by Heracles; it is apparently for this reason that he has decided to include a lengthy treatment of Heracles' labours in his historical work.

So, we are left with a complex situation. On the one hand, Diodorus seems to take for granted that historiography aims at narrating the true events of the past, and that these events took place in a mythical past where such superhuman deeds were somehow possible, making a seemingly impossible narrative potentially true. On the other hand, he believes that there are different standards for truth depending on whether he is writing about recent or long-past events. Moreover, the

purpose of truth telling more often than not disappears behind other purposes: worship of heroic benefactors, praise for those who deserve it, moral instruction and didactic usefulness.

The only time in the *Bibliothēke* we see Diodorus extolling the kind of factual truth that we have seen Polybius claim as a crucial feature of historiography is in book thirteen, in a brief and thoroughly Polybius-flavoured attack on Timaeus' mendacity:

περὶ δὲ τούτου φιλοτιμότερον εἰπεῖν προήχθην, διότι Τίμαιος ὁ τῶν πρό γε αὐτοῦ συγγραφέων πικρότατα κατηγορήσας καὶ συγγνώμην οὐδεμίαν τοῖς ιστοριογράφοις ἀπολιπὼν αὐτὸς εὗρίσκεται σχεδιάζων, ἐν οἷς μάλιστα ἑαυτὸν ἀποπέφραγκεν ἀκριβολογούμενον. δεῖ γάρ, οἶμαι, τοὺς συγγραφεῖς ἐν μὲν τοῖς ἀγνοήμασι τυγχάνειν συγγνώμης, ὥς ἂν ἀνθρώπους ὄντας καὶ τῆς ἐν τοῖς παροισχομένοις χρόνοις ἀληθείας οὔσης δυσσευρέτου, τοὺς μέντοι γε κατὰ προαίρεσιν οὐ τυγχάνοντας τοῦ ἀκριβοῦς προσηκόντως κατηγορίας τυγχάνειν, ὅταν κολακεύοντές τινας ἢ δι' ἔχθραν πικρότερον προσβάλλοντες ἀποσφάλλωνται τῆς ἀληθείας.

I have been led to speak of this matter rather copiously because Timaeus, who criticized most bitterly the historians before his time and left the writers of history bereft of all forgiveness, is himself caught improvising in the very province where he most proclaims his own accuracy. For historians should, in my opinion, be granted charity in errors that come of ignorance, since they are human beings and since the truth of ages past is hard to discover, but historians who deliberately do not give the exact facts should properly be open to censure, whenever in flattering one man or another or in attacking others from hatred too bitterly, they stray from the truth.

D. S. 13.90.6–7

Diodorus begins with stating, twice, that historiographers who make mistakes inadvertently (ἐν τοῖς ἀγνοήμασι) should meet with 'forgiveness' or 'charity' (συγγνώμη). He then criticises Timaeus for 'deliberately being sloppy with details' (τοὺς μέντοι γε κατὰ προαίρεσιν οὐ τυγχάνοντας τοῦ ἀκριβοῦς) in this particular instance (the bull of Phalaris) before concluding that such historians deserve to be criticised 'whenever in flattering one man or another or in attacking others from hatred too bitterly, they stray from the truth (τῆς ἀληθείας)'. This sounds a lot like Polybius, and it is worth noting that Diodorus here too assumes that 'truth' often means 'truth in praise and blame'. In fact, one gets the impression that Diodorus is here playing at being Polybius by using criticism of historiographical predecessors to boost his own credentials.²²

If we turn from Diodorus' programmatic statements to the actual narrative of the *Bibliothēke*, two issues stand out as particularly problematic in terms of factual truth: his inclusion of six books of

mythology (as mentioned above), rationalised to varying degrees,²³ and his widespread practice of adorning his narrative, even of events that happened hundreds of years before his time, with vivid scenes including direct speech and other circumstantial details. We shall examine these two issues one by one.

Faced with Diodorus' inclusion of mythology in his work of history a twenty-first-century critical reader is bound to wonder in what sense Diodorus conceived of his mythological narrative as true, that is if he believed that it had a different truth value from the 'historical' narrative of the later books.²⁴ The two passages quoted immediately above make it clear that Diodorus was aware of the different status of myth, as something that had happened in a past with different natural laws, and about which certain knowledge was impossible. The actual mythological narrative of books one to six is also markedly different from the historical narrative of the later books. First, the narrative consists mainly of fast-paced summary, without the vivid and detailed scenes that characterise much of the historical narrative of the later books. There are few references to emotions, very few attempts at characterisation, and almost no direct speech. It seems that Diodorus felt that the different nature of this material made it less suitable for dramatisation.

Secondly, Diodorus narrates many of the mythological stories (although not the lengthy one about Heracles) entirely or almost entirely in *oratio obliqua*, making them depend on verbs such as φασί (1.16.3, 2.39.1, 4.9.1), λέγουσι (1.10.4) and μυθολογοῦσι (3.53.4).²⁵ This is not because he took over those narratives wholesale from his sources (as nineteenth-century *Quellenforschung* would have it),²⁶ for it is clear that he changed at least the vocabulary,²⁷ and, more importantly, it is likely that much of his historical narrative is based equally closely on one source at a time.²⁸ Nor is it simply a distancing device to signal disbelief or sceptical distance, although it may well be that too.²⁹ Primarily, the effect of the indirect reporting is to draw sustained and repeated attention to the fact that these are *traditions* being recorded for posterity—of Egypt (book one), of Assyria (book two) and of Greece (book four)—rather than strict, factual truth. Diodorus even demonstrates his awareness of the existence of different, often mutually contradictory traditions about the same gods and heroes by sometimes placing them side by side and explicitly contrasting them. This is the case with his three different versions of the Dionysus myth at 3.62–74, which he introduces with the statement that it is appropriate (οἰκεῖον) for him to relate 'the myths told about his god among the Greeks' (τὰ μυθολογούμενα περὶ τοῦ θεοῦ τούτου παρὰ τοῖς Ἑλλήσι) followed by the assertion that this is

not going to be easy as his sources are in disagreement with each other (ἀλλήλοις ἀσύμφωνα) and say some outlandish (τερατώδεις) things. We recognise both the sense of duty to tell the story of the god and the misgivings about the difficulty this entails from Diodorus' introduction to his account of Heracles. In the case of the Dionysus stories, Diodorus does not offer any solutions to the difficulty along the lines of the *epimeleia* applied to the myths of Heracles, but instead proceeds to tell each story briefly side by side, signalling clearly the transition from one to the next and the differences between them (one tradition has Dionysus simply representing the 'gift of wine', one has the story of one Dionysus who accomplished all the deeds ascribed to the god of that name, and one has stories of three separate divine beings named Dionysus). He does not choose between the versions, either of Dionysus myths in this instance or of other myth variants elsewhere. This approach to mythological stories is closely tied in with the statement we saw in 4.8, which put *pasa epimeleia*, 'the greatest care', as the benchmark for good historiography of the mythical period (echoed by his promise to report the Dionysus stories 'as accurately as possible for ancient history' at 1.24). 'Great care' has allowed Diodorus to uncover these various versions of the same story and record them side by side, but it gives him no criteria by which to make a decision about which one is true. Perhaps he wanted to leave the reader free to make his own conclusions in the tradition of Herodotus, or perhaps he somehow thought that all the variants were equally true. At the very least, he seems to believe that something like this happened, but that it is impossible by human means to uncover the exact details.

Perhaps Diodorus even considered such critical analysis of divine myths impious. We saw in 4.8 that *epimeleia* was, for him, closely connected with religious worship, and that his inclusion of mythical material has a pious dimension. This is also part of the reason why the mythical material is too important for him to leave out (4.8.5, see above)—we owe it to Heracles to keep narrating his deeds as an act of worship despite the fact that we cannot now know the exact details of them. This raises the possibility that Diodorus thought of the myths as symbolically true rather than literally true, although he gives no explicit indication of this.

Considering Diodorus' preoccupation with moral didacticism, it is more than likely that he also intended the mythical narratives to have a didactic function. It has been argued that Diodorus meant his narrative of Heracles to function as a paradigm for later, historical characters, who likewise travelled far and (on his interpretation) spread civilisation to barbarous lands, namely Alexander the Great

and Julius Caesar.³⁰ This may well be right; it is certainly true that Diodorus had a fascination for both Alexander and Caesar,³¹ and heroes such as Heracles are useful larger-than-life exemplars because the reader is likely to admire and revere them even before he meets them in Diodorus' text; they come with inbuilt moral authority, so to speak. On a much more general level, however, Diodorus' mythical narratives, if one reads them from one end to the other, teach a simple and fundamental moral lesson: the gods exist, and in the distant heroic past, men and women who displayed conspicuous kindness, generosity and piety were rewarded with love and loyalty while alive and often with divine worship after their deaths, while those who behaved with brutality and impiety most often ended up suffering dire fates.³² In his historical books, a very similar situation pertains: the wicked tend to come to grief, often by means of divine intervention, while the morally good are successful, and if they do not win divine worship at their deaths, they are at least memorialised by historiography.³³ In this way the mythological books function as a useful preamble to the historical books in setting up how the world works—and its workings, for Diodorus, are largely moral. The mythological books, then, seem to embody a symbolic, moral truth rather than a strict, factual one.

It is possible to extend this last claim to parts of the historical books. One of the defining characteristics of the *Bibliothèque* and one of the features that arouse the distrust of modern historians is its widespread use of what we might call vignettes: short vivid scenes full of circumstantial details, including direct speech.³⁴ Examples are a series of anecdotes that illustrate the virtues of Pittacus as one of the Seven Sages (9.12), an anecdote about Tellias of Acragas that illustrates how wit is more important than looks (13.83), a cluster of anecdotes that show the dangers of speaking one's mind to the increasingly paranoid Dionysius I, and an anecdote that shows Philip II relinquishing his abusive behaviour towards Athenian prisoners-of-war when reproached by Demades the orator (16.87). I have called them anecdotes because they are obviously retellings of stories in circulation about these famous men, reproduced by Diodorus for one of the same reasons that he retells the myths, namely that they are exemplary. Just as Heracles represents a certain kind of (superhuman) virtue, so Pittacus and Tellias embody the virtues of generosity and wisdom, Dionysius I functions as the quintessential paranoid tyrant, and Philip II becomes an illustration of the temptation to become arrogant in one's good fortune. They are all larger-than-life characters who work as symbols of a particular virtue or vice (or set of virtues and vices if we look beyond the text passages mentioned here) and the

effect that it will generally have in the world that Diodorus describes. The truth that they embody is not factual, but moral, and world defining.

One further, final, problem with Diodorus' truthfulness is closely related. It is his tendency to include vivid, circumstantial details in narratives of events that took place a long time before his own time, i.e. what Wiseman has called 'the lie of too much information'.³⁵ This is part of what Polybius criticises in Phylarchus. Already Ephorus, writing in the generation after Xenophon, had stated that, with regard to contemporary history, we trust the most those who seem to report most accurately, but with regard to ancient history, such pretended accuracy arouses suspicion.³⁶ Diodorus is especially guilty of this when he narrates events involving great suffering, such as the fall of a city. In these cases the historicity of his account is further brought into doubt because of the close similarity of narratives occurring in different contexts. These passages almost all include the crying and screaming of the victims (13.57.1, 13.89.1) and the shouting or mutual encouragement of the attackers (13.57.1, 17.13.1, 19.6.5), the desperate courage of the citizens' last stand (13.57.2, 17.13.2–3, 19.6.6), the greed and ruthlessness of the invaders (13.57.2, 17.70.4, 19.7.3), the indiscriminate slaughter (13.57.3, 13.90.1, 17.13.6, 17.70.2, 19.6.6–7.2), the disregard for the sanctity of temples (13.57.4–5, 13.90.1–3, 17.13.6, 19.7.3–4), women and children being dragged away as slaves (17.13.3, 17.35.7, 17.70.6), the pity felt by some onlookers, imagined or real, for the victims (13.58.1, 17.36.1–2, 19.7.4), the changed fortune of the victims, particularly the women (13.58.1–2, 13.89.1–3, 17.35.4–7, 17.70.3 and 6), allusions to the sexual abuse of captive women and girls (13.58.2, 17.35.7, 19.8.3–5), the richness of the spoils (13.90.3–4, 17.35.2–4, 17.70.2–3), and the number of the dead and captive (13.57.6, 17.14.1, 19.8.1–2).³⁷ It is certainly true that Diodorus is unlikely to have had detailed and accurate information about such details in every case, and he may well have made them up in more than one instance. For his narratives of the fall of Sicilian cities (Selinous 13.57–8, Acragas 13.89–90) it is possible that he—as a Sicilian himself—drew on Sicilian cultural memory beside his written source(s), but for the destructions of Thebes, the Persian camp at Issus, and Persepolis by Alexander the Great (17.13, 17.35–6, 17.70) such knowledge is unlikely. However, there can be little doubt that his descriptions match the general reality of what the capture of a city was like. With enemy soldiers raging through the city, killing civilians or dragging them off to slavery, there must have been crying and screaming, as well as soldiers who went to extremes in their greed for loot and abuse of captives. If Diodorus did

not find the details in his source, he has supplied them from his general knowledge of the reality of war—he had most likely lived in Sicily during the Roman Civil War and so may well have witnessed similar scenes first hand or talked to eyewitnesses.³⁸ He may well have thought of his detailed narratives as representing the truth more honestly than could have been achieved by a bare account along the lines of ‘the Macedonians captured the city, killed all the men, made the women and children slaves, and acquired large spoils’. These additions to what he could legitimately know may well have had a partly moral–didactic purpose in making the readers condemn the victors’ cruelty and abuse of their good fortune. The addition of circumstantial details makes the exemplars connect with the reader on an emotional level and stick in his mind, making them more useful. Over and above that, however, such invented details are a different way of getting at the ‘real’ truth of what historical events were really like, of making the reader feel as if he was there.³⁹ Some twenty-first-century historians experiment with a similar blending of facts and invention by adding a partly fictionalised protagonist to a background of verifiable events.⁴⁰

Conclusion

Both Polybius and Diodorus consider truth only one out of several essential ingredients of good historiography. They both insist that a good account of the past should not just be truthful, but should also be useful, primarily in moral–didactic terms.

Polybius repeatedly extols truth and moral utility as the twin purposes of historiography and sees them as complementary rather than contradictory goals. The ‘truth’ that he is committed to is partly factual, partly didactic. He let moral–didactic concerns guide his selection and weighting of material and was probably also, occasionally, led by such concerns to include invented circumstantial details. For him, this did not compromise historical truth, but rather made it stand out more clearly: a jumble of random events became crystallised into moral *exempla* with meaning and usefulness for the present.

Diodorus goes further. He only rarely talks about truth, but repeatedly stresses moral didacticism as the main purpose of historiography, although he does sometimes seem to take it as a given that historiography should also be truthful. He considers it right to include a large amount of mythological narrative, partly rationalised, which he signals as true in a different sense from his true accounts of

historical events. These narratives are symbolically true, that is, they stand in for what really happened, which is now unknowable, partly because it happened so long ago, and partly because it happened in a different kind of time, where events followed different causal laws and therefore fall outside our horizon of comprehension. Such narratives use mythical characters already known and respected by the readers to offer powerful moral *exempla*. Modern comments on moral didacticism in historiography tend to oppose ‘moralising’ to truthfulness,⁴¹ but that is not how the Hellenistic historians saw it. For them, truthfulness was intimately connected with moral didacticism, and this didacticism determined both their selection of material and the shape of their narrative.

In addition, Diodorus seems to add invented details more freely than Polybius, probably not just for moral–didactic purposes, but also in order to give a truer picture of what certain events, such as the sacking of a city, were really like. This may strike traditional-minded Classical scholars as bad historiographical practice; but producers of historical documentaries and even some historians writing today will recognise both the impulse and its pedagogical effect: such details make the reader/viewer connect with the historical topic on an emotional level and thereby understand the true significance of the events.

Overall, we can conclude that Polybius’ and Diodorus’ concept of historical truth only partially overlapped with ours, and that ‘truth’ is perhaps a more elastic idea than we usually assume.

Notes

- 1 I believe that this is still fair to say despite the waves caused by Hayden White and other theorists of history since the 1970s.
- 2 See e.g. Hunter (1973), Woodman (1988), Moles (1993).
- 3 Woodman (1988) is a seminal study of the intersection between ancient historiographical and rhetorical theory and practice and stresses the influence on historiography of the rhetorical practice of *inventio*, i.e. the invention of details. Hayden White (e.g. 1973, 1978) has shown that all historiography of all time periods is rhetorical in the sense that historical events are only made meaningful by being arranged in a narrative pattern and that their perceived truth value depends on the reader’s acceptance of the type of plot imposed on the events.
- 4 See e.g. Gehrke (2001), Pownall (2004) and Bleckmann (2005).
- 5 The Polybius text used throughout the paper is the Loeb; all translations are by W. R. Paton.
- 6 See e.g. Walbank (1957, 10–11 and 1972, 43–4), McGing (2010, 69) and Vercruysse (1990), whose paper discusses Polybius’ use of accusations of lying

- in his polemics against other historians. For Polybius' commitment to historical truth see also Pédech (1964) and Sacks (1980).
- 7 Woodman (1988, 73–5) has argued that this is what truth in historiography meant to Cicero, Sallust, Tacitus and Lucian, but he does not discuss Polybius.
 - 8 For a good overview and discussion of *Histories* 12 see Schepens (1990).
 - 9 Other such passages in book twelve are: 12.7, 12.11.4–5, 12.11.8–12.7, 12.15.11–12, 12.17–22, 12.25a, 12.25b.1 and 12.25i.7–9.
 - 10 Polybius seems to have drawn no clear line between practical and moral instruction; see Walbank (1990) and Hau (2016).
 - 11 Good, recent discussions of Plb. 2.56–8 (with references to numerous previous discussions) are Marincola (2003 and 2013), Schepens (2005) and Eckstein (2013). See also Wiater in this volume.
 - 12 See e.g. the rhetorical question τί δ' ἂν παθόντες οὗτοι δίκην δόξαιεν ἀρμόζουσιν δεδωκέναι?, 'What would these men have to suffer to seem to have paid the fitting penalty?' (2.58.9).
 - 13 Another is his narrative of the training programme of Scipio Africanus the Younger as a young man in Rome (31.25–30).
 - 14 For a detailed discussion of moral didacticism in Polybius see Hau (2016).
 - 15 See e.g. Schwartz (1903), Kunz (1935), Hornblower (1981), Canfora (1990) and Stylianou (1998). A re-evaluation has begun with, among others, Drews (1962), Sacks (1990), Hadley (1996), Rubincam (1987, 1989, 1998), Lévy (2001), Lefèvre (2002), Ambaglio (2008) and Hau (2009) and has in some cases perhaps gone too far; see Hau et al. (forthcoming a).
 - 16 On Diodorus' narrator persona see Hau (forthcoming).
 - 17 For the notion of universal history see Alonso-Núñez (1990), Liddel and Fear (2010), and Marincola (2011).
 - 18 The Diodorus text used in this paper is the Loeb; the translations are by Oldfather.
 - 19 Prefaces are extant for books two, three, four, five, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-six, thirty-two and thirty-seven. For detailed discussions of Diodorus' prefaces see Kunz (1935), who assumes that Diodorus copied each of them from his sources and includes fragments she believes to come from the prefaces to books twenty-one and twenty-five, and Sacks (1990, 9–22), who argues that Diodorus composed all of the prefaces from scratch. For a discussion of the moral–didactic prefaces only, see Hau (2016, 77–9).
 - 20 Prefaces to books thirteen and twenty respectively.
 - 21 Prefaces to books twelve, fourteen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty-six and thirty-two.
 - 22 Walbank (1945) offers a meticulous comparison of this passage and the one by Polybius that inspired it (Plb. 12.25) and demonstrates conclusively that Diodorus did not take over Polybius' arguments for criticising Timaeus, but only his catchphrases.
 - 23 In a rationalising mode, many of the gods are said to be mortals who received divine honours for their benefactions to mankind, but Semele is still killed by Zeus' divine presence and the premature baby Dionysus hidden in his father's thigh (3.64.3–6), Heracles fights a variety of supernatural monsters (4.9–40), and Prometheus has his liver repeatedly eaten by an eagle for stealing fire and giving it to human beings (4.15.2). See also Ring (forthcoming, n. 41).

- 24 For the question to what extent Greek historiographers believed in the myths they recounted, see Cartledge (2002, ch. 2) and Gehrke (2011). For the perceived status of myth *vis-à-vis* truth more generally among the Greeks, see Ruffell in this volume.
- 25 For a detailed overview of Diodorus' narrative in *oratio obliqua* see Volkmann (1955). See also Muntz (forthcoming).
- 26 E.g. Schwartz (1903) and also Volkmann (1955), who argues that it was common practice among Diodorus' sources to narrate myths in *oratio obliqua*.
- 27 See Palm (1955).
- 28 See my discussion of Diodorus' source usage with bibliography in Hau (2009).
- 29 Marincola (1997, 121).
- 30 Sartori (1984), Wiater (2006), Sulimani (2011), Ring (forthcoming).
- 31 See D. S. 17 and 32.27 respectively. See, however, Westall (forthcoming), who questions Diodorus' commitment to Caesar and argues that he may well have been a Pompeian.
- 32 See e.g. D. S. 3.65, 4.22.5, 4.63.4, 4.68.2, 4.69.3–5, 4.71, 4.81.5, 5.3.6, 5.55.6–7, 5.71–72.1.
- 33 See e.g. D. S. 10.16.2, 13.103.1–2, 16.61–4, 17.17.6–18.1. I discuss this feature of the *Bibliothēke* in detail in Hau (2016, 88–95).
- 34 Full-blown speeches—of which there are very few in Diodorus—are a subcategory of this.
- 35 Wiseman (1993).
- 36 'περὶ μὲν γὰρ τῶν καθ' ἡμᾶς γεγεννημένων' φησὶ 'τοὺς ἀκριβέστατα λέγοντας πιστοτάτους ἡγούμεθα, περὶ δὲ τῶν παλαιῶν τοὺς οὕτω διεξιόντας ἀπιθανωτάτους εἶναι νομίζομεν, ὑπολαμβάνοντες οὔτε τὰς πράξεις ἀπάσας οὔτε τῶν λόγων τοὺς πλείστους εἰκὸς εἶναι μνημονεύεσθαι διὰ τοσούτων'. *FGrH* 70 F 9 = Harpocration, s.v. ἀρχαίως (s.v. καινῶς)
- 37 This list of similarities is taken from Hau (2016, 113), which does not discuss the historical accuracy of the passages, but uses them to illustrate the use of *pathos* as a form of moralising.
- 38 For Diodorus' situation as a Sicilian during the Civil War see Sacks (1990, 117–59).
- 39 This is akin to the kind of 'general truth' claimed for Herodotus and Thucydides by Moles (1993). See also Meeus in this volume (section entitled, 'Making Sense of Ctesias' Place in Ancient Historiography').
- 40 See e.g. Lee (2010).
- 41 E.g. Pownall (2004, v): 'a tendency of certain Greek historians . . . to sacrifice accuracy, relevance, and impartiality to the presentation of moral exempla'.

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12 Alexander and the Amazonian Queen

Truth and Fiction

Joseph Roisman

The story of Alexander's meeting with the queen of the Amazons is one of the better-known episodes of his Asian expedition. It tells of the queen's arrival with an Amazonian guard at his camp in Hyrcania, where she asked to sleep with him in order to bear the child prodigy that would result from their union. For thirteen days Alexander dutifully obliged, and then she returned home. Except for Justin (2.4.33), all sources lose interest in the queen after her departure.

The authenticity of this tale was already disputed by Alexander's contemporaries, and most scholars agree that the meeting and the Amazons as described in our sources belong to the world of fiction. Historians are divided, however, on who originated the story, what could have motivated its promulgation and what historical events, if any, may have inspired it.¹ This paper tries to take the discussion in a different direction by asking what moved our extant sources—Diodorus Siculus, Strabo, Q. Curtius Rufus, Arrian and Justin—to accept or reject the story. It argues that their decisions about its truthfulness and inclusion were not simply made for them by their sources, but were influenced by considerations having little to do with Alexander's story, such as preconceived notions about gender, about the difference between myth and history (as in the case of the Amazons), and a variety of literary concerns. I shall deal with these historians' accounts in their chronological order.²

The story of Alexander's meeting with the Amazon queen appears to support the traditional but controversial classification of the extant sources on Alexander into the allegedly more-reliable class of Arrian and Plutarch on the one hand and the so-called Vulgate authors—including Diodorus Siculus, Curtius Rufus and Justin—on the other. Plutarch (explicitly) and Arrian (by omission) reject the story, while the Vulgate authors record it without qualifications. It is generally agreed that the Vulgate's common or ultimate source was Cleitarchus,

who described the queen's visit to Alexander, according to Plutarch (*Alex.* 46.1 = 137 F15 *FGrH*). Cleitarchus' date is a notorious scholarly crux, with many scholars assuming that he wrote around the end of the fourth century and before Ptolemy's publication of his Alexander history.³ Yet a recently published, anonymous papyrus (POxy 21.4808), although badly mutilated, claims that Cleitarchus was the teacher of Ptolemy IV Philopator, who was born in the late 240s. This assertion should not be seized upon as a decisive proof for lowering Cleitarchus' date, but the alternative of assuming an error on the author's part or changing the name of the king to an earlier Ptolemy is even less attractive. If the papyrus is to be believed, it makes it likely that Cleitarchus wrote his history after Ptolemy's and when the story of the queen's visit was already controversial.⁴ His motives can only be speculated upon. A. B. Bosworth suggests that Cleitarchus, like many other historians, wished to report marvellous things (see on Strabo below), and E. Baynham thinks that the story represented an ideology that promoted the mixing of, and amity between, barbarians and their conquerors.⁵ None of these goals presupposes that Cleitarchus regarded the tale as fiction.

Diodorus Siculus

Diodorus, who provides the earliest extant record of the visit (17.77.1–3; *Contents*), locates it in Hyrcania, as do a number of other sources. He identifies Queen Thallestris (*sic*) as the ruler of the Amazonian kingdom on the Black Sea and endows her with beauty and masculine qualities such as a powerful physique, courage and respectability (*axioma*). He says that the queen left her army on the Hyrcanian border and came to Alexander's camp in the company of 300 armoured Amazons. When Alexander asked her purpose, she declared that she wanted to have his baby, explaining that, because he surpassed all other men in accomplishments and she all other women in physical strength and manly courage, their child would excel all others. Alexander happily obliged and spent the next thirteen days in her company before sending her home with honours and gifts.

For a number of reasons, Diodorus did not subject the story to his usual notorious abbreviation and contraction of sources. The tale includes captivating elements of the wondrous and inverted world that were integral parts of Greek tales about barbarians and especially Amazons, the women who acted like men. The queen's rationale for expecting an excellent child also made good eugenic sense. No less important is the fact that, despite the attention lavished on Thallestris, the story is focalised through Alexander and puts him in charge of the

meeting with this most warlike and independent of women.⁶ It is told from his perspective: he admires her appearance, queries her goal, has to be persuaded to agree to their union and is the one who sends her away. Like our other sources, Diodorus has nothing to say about the fate of the child. Justin at least reports that Thallestris died shortly after the visit and that the Amazons' name perished with her (Just. 2.4.33), but Diodorus is more interested in the lovemaking that confirms the queen's description of Alexander as superior to all other men.

It is highly likely that Diodorus judged the story to be true and expected the same belief of his readers. He normally shunned source criticism, and even if he was aware of the polemics of the story, he preferred to follow his likely source, Cleitarchus. Diodorus' decision that the story was true and worth preserving seems also to be related to his account of the Amazons earlier in the *Library*. In books two to four Diodorus recounts Amazonian tales quite extensively and in full awareness of their problematic nature.⁷ For example, before embarking in book two on his first excursus on the Amazons who lived around the River Thermodon in Pontus, he states: 'But for our part, since we have mentioned the Amazons, we feel that is not foreign to our purpose to discuss them, even though what we shall say will be so marvelous that it will resemble a tale from mythology (διὰ τὴν παραδοξολογίαν μύθοις ὅμοια φανήσεται)' (2.44.3, trans. Oldfather). Later he says that after the death of the Amazon warrior Penthesileia in the Trojan War the Amazons became fewer and weaker, 'consequently in later times, whenever any writers recount their prowess, men consider the ancient stories about the Amazons to be fictitious tales (μύθους ἡγοῦνται πεπλασμένους)' (2.46.6, trans. Oldfather; cf. Aristid. 1.84). Like other historians, Diodorus distinguishes between myth, which concerned marvellous and fictitious matters, and history, 'the prophetess of truth' (*Preface* 2.2). Nevertheless, as his statements about the Amazonian stories suggest, he regarded such tales as myths only in form, and when incorporating them into his history he committed himself to their authenticity. He was even quite proud to have 'rediscovered' the Libyan Amazons, who he claimed lived earlier than the Thermodonian Amazons, and whose fame was appropriated by them.⁸ I propose, then, that Diodorus' view of the visit of the Amazon queen as truth or fiction was influenced not just by his source but also by his belief about the Amazons' existence and by his earlier description of them as historical figures. Indeed, he seems to have borrowed material from his Amazonian tales in the early books for this episode. He is the only source who mentions that the queen marched with her army all the way to the Hyrcanian

border, but he does not explain her reasons for bringing the troops along, probably because in his earlier descriptions of the Amazons their queens are inseparable from their army. Moreover, in his accounts of the pre-Alexander Amazons he often notes their strength (*alke*), manly courage (*andreia*) and the wonder (*paradoxos*) they evoked, with all three characteristics recurring in his description of the queen and her visit.⁹ Unlike some other ancient authors, however, Diodorus was not concerned about the question of whether the Amazons survived into Alexander's day, and he readily extended their persistence in history. His lack of scruple in this regard is suggested by his careless report of the Amazons' demise in his earlier tale of how Heracles crushed their army completely and how their neighbours used their weakness to obliterate even their name—an account that forced him to ascribe their later reappearance and invasion of Athens to Amazonian survivors.¹⁰ Lastly, in Diodorus' description of the Amazons, scholars have detected Greek images of a savage or semi-civilised society that perverted the masculine order of the *polis*.¹¹ This is not the place to demonstrate Diodorus' more nuanced depiction of the Amazons; it is enough to say that there is nothing wild, depraved or threatening in his queen. How could there be, if her appearance and goal flattered Alexander?¹²

Strabo

Strabo's treatment of our episode is similarly influenced by his preconceptions regarding the Amazons' historicity, preconceptions that led him to reject it. The geographer was sceptical of tales of the Amazons and especially of reports of their existence in historical time. His account illustrates how the meeting between the queen and the king lost its particular significance for Alexander's story and became part of a debate over the historical existence of and traditions about the Amazons.¹³

Strabo's use of the tale is also a good example of why 'Fragments of Greek Historians' in the style of Jacoby should not be analysed out of context. The geographer commences his description of the Amazons by citing authors who he says are supposed to be familiar with the region where the Amazons allegedly live, but nevertheless locate them in different places (11.5.1). Elsewhere in his *Geography*, geographical incongruities involving the Amazons serve to discredit stories about them, and Strabo suggests as much here.¹⁴ After planting doubts in his readers' minds, Strabo proceeds to describe at relative length the Amazons' way of life and their relations with their neighbours and former subjects, the Gargarians, who also served as their partners for

procreation (11.5.1–2). He follows it with a discourse on accounts of the Amazons, which recaps his earlier observations on the difference between history and fiction (1.2.8–9). The geographer asserts that Amazonian historiography is different from other histories, which strive to separate the historical from the mythical: ‘for the things that are ancient and false and marvelous (*to teratodes*) are called myths, but history wishes for the truth, whether ancient or recent, and contains no marvellous element, or else only rarely’ (11.5.3, trans. H. L. Jones, slightly modified). According to Strabo, ancient and contemporary descriptions of the Amazons have failed the test of distinguishing between truth and the marvellous. He goes on to ask who can believe that women alone could have accomplished all the feats ascribed to them (see below), and complains that authors who keep telling such stories increase the peculiarity of Amazonian history, because credibility is accorded to ancient instead of present (that is, more critical) accounts (11.5.3).

In fact, Strabo’s view of the Amazons is more complex or confused. On the one hand, he is full of contemptuous criticism of their history and advises his readers to be incredulous of it, thereby undermining everything he has just reported about their customs and actions. On the other hand, he follows this criticism with an ‘it is said’, that they founded several cities in Asia Minor and that they left tombs and monuments behind. ‘All writers say’, he adds, that they used to live around the River Thermodon but that they were driven out of that region (11.5.4). Elsewhere in his *Geography* he is even willing to accept accounts of their early (mythical) deeds or presence (12.3.21, 24; 12.8.6; 13.3.3; 14.1.4; cf. 12.3.9, 14). How can we account for this contradictory treatment of the Amazonian tales? I would suggest that Strabo in fact compromised on his sweeping rejection of their historicity. Like Arrian (see below), he regarded some stories about the ancient Amazons as more believable than reports about their descendants,¹⁵ probably because the former were attested all over Greece and Asia Minor by what people believed were Amazonian names, monuments, and other traces.¹⁶ Rather than confronting such well-established ‘memories’ head on, Strabo acknowledged their validity, or oscillated about it, but he drew the line about Amazons surviving into present or historical times, because they were less well attested and did not form an integral part of local identities—hence his attack on the tradition that the Amazon queen paid a visit to Alexander. Since he was also quite fond of faulting other works, at times simply for the sake of displaying scepticism (warranted or unwarranted), he was determined to discredit the story.

Strabo first notes that only a few authors report the Amazons’

present whereabouts and that these accounts are uncorroborated and untrustworthy. The example he provides is the story of Thelestria (*sic*) and Alexander. He states that historians disagree about it and that many writers who are most interested in truth and are most trusted fail to report it (11.5.4). It might be expecting too much of Strabo to identify some of these better authorities or even to specify what made them trustworthy, but his earlier comments on the difference between history and myth in relation to the Amazons suggest his criteria for telling fiction from fact. In his discussion of the Amazons, Strabo declares it unbelievable that an army, *polis* or *ethnos* built exclusively on women could prevail, not to mention go on invading territories as far away as Ionia or Attica. Belief in such tales, he opines, is tantamount to saying that in those times men were women and women men (11.5.3). This reveals what Strabo saw as the marvellous elements that separated myth from history. Amazons made no sense in a world founded on a traditional gender dichotomy, and truth meant masculine truth or what men did and deemed plausible. (In an earlier book he distinguishes between female rule and civilised order [οὐ πάνυ πολιτικόν]: 3.4.18). Strabo, then, was predisposed to dispute the visit of the Amazon queen even before he found it in his sources. When he read about it in Cleitarchus, whom he had already dismissed for making the distance between the Caspian and the Euxine seas shorter than it should be (11.1.5 = F 13), he searched for another geographical incongruity in order to fault it, as was his habit. This he found in Cleitarchus' report that the queen set out on her journey from the Caspian Gates and the (River) Thermodon, which were 6,000 stades apart (11.5.4). Clearly, such a mistake was insufficient to discredit the entire story, but it was in line with Strabo's earlier suggestion that disagreements on the exact locations of the Amazons cast doubt on the accounts about them (11.5.1). It is worth repeating that this brief citation or fragment of Cleitarchus tells less about him than about the author who cites him.¹⁷

From that point Strabo, probably inspired by Eratosthenes, proceeds to criticise historians of Alexander who tell marvellous stories and distort facts in order to flatter and glorify the king.¹⁸ Scholars have been keen to endorse his criticism and have detected attempts as far back as Alexander's contemporaries or his staff to heroise the king on the scale of mythical figures. It is important to note that no other ancient author who cites Cleitarchus includes him in this category. Strabo, who could not have known what moved Cleitarchus to record the story, only surmised that he intended thus to glorify Alexander. Nevertheless he creates a dubious link of geographical blunders between Cleitarchus and other authors who Strabo claims invented

stories in the interest of flattery more than of truth, moving the Caucasus Mountains to India in order to show Alexander reaching the edges of the Earth and thereby to associate him with mythological heroes such as Heracles, Prometheus, Dionysus and Jason. Yet by Strabo's own account Cleitarchus did not report that Alexander reached the Caucasus in Europe or in India, only that the Amazonian queen came from the Caucasus and the Caspian when Alexander was actually in Hyrcania (11.5.4–5). In other words, the geographer's primary goal in citing the story about the queen of the Amazons was not to authenticate or dispute an event in Alexander history but to refute the supposition that there were Amazons living in the vicinity of the Albanians in historical times.

Q. Curtius Rufus

In Q. Curtius Rufus' history the story of the visit is reported without any reservations, both because it is worth telling and (especially) because it portends an alleged transformation of Alexander's character.¹⁹ Curtius has already discussed Alexander's lapse into foreign luxury and hedonism, but his comments there sharply digress from the narrative (6.2.1–5). His next discourse on Alexander's adoption of foreign ways is much better integrated into the history, because, as we shall see, Curtius uses the queen's visit to prepare the reader for the king's change of habits.²⁰

Curtius' description of the queen's visit shares details with Diodorus and Justin, and all three place it in the same sequence of events, suggesting that they used a common source, probably Cleitarchus.²¹ Yet Curtius includes an episode that is absent in Diodorus and Justin (who abbreviated their sources), and his motive for doing so may be reconstructed. Before the visit of Thalestris (Curtius' spelling), Alexander accepted the surrender of the high Persian official Nabarzanes, who brought with him the young and very handsome eunuch Bagoas. This Persian youth had been Darius' sexual partner and now became Alexander's lover. Curtius adds that Alexander pardoned Nabarzanes (who had plotted against Darius), largely thanks to Bagoas' influence. The eunuch cuts a sinister figure in Curtius. He later appears as an evil schemer who uses Alexander's attraction to him in order to eliminate a noble Persian satrap (Curt. 10.1.22–38). Eunuchs were often an object of derision (as well as fear and pity) for Greeks and Romans, whose sensibilities about sex roles were offended by the giving of power to these effeminate men. Something of this attitude seems to influence Curtius' narrative. Although he reports earlier that Alexander had already decided not to harm Nabarzanes

after the latter's written request (6.4.8–14), his assertion here that the king pardoned Nabarzanes thanks to the sexual allure of the eunuch suggests Alexander's moral weakness.²²

Thalestris' visit follows Bagoas' arrival chronologically as well as thematically. If Diodorus dwells on her masculine prowess, Curtius stresses her strong sexual drive, saying that, 'inflamed with desire, she wished to visit the king' (*cupidine visendi regis accensa*; 6.5.25). Upon seeing Alexander, she dismounted her horse holding two spears in her hands. As if to balance her martial display, Curtius follows it with a description of the Amazons' dress, which did not cover the whole body but left the left side, including the breast, exposed. This is also the breast that was not cauterised but used to nurse babies. The queen's sexuality, as opposed to her courage and *andreia* in Diodorus, seems to dominate her attributes in Curtius.²³

Curtius is not averse to inserting humour into his narrative, as in the following scene.²⁴ The fearless queen measures Alexander up, but appears to be disappointed with his relatively small stature, which did not correspond to barbarian standards of great men. (In Diodorus, there is no such problem, and the queen proclaims herself and the king a perfect match thanks to their equal martial prowess.²⁵) When asked for the purpose of her visit, she declares that she wants to share children with the king, and follows with an offer that, as we know from other sources, corresponded with the Amazonian mating arrangement with neighbouring males: she would take the child if female, and he would get an heir for his kingdom if a male was born.²⁶ Alexander suggests that she serve in his army (perhaps as a substitute for having to sleep with her), but she diplomatically declines and insists that she not be disappointed. What comes next illustrates how different historians mould the same material differently. Both Curtius and Diodorus use a source in which Alexander slept with the queen for thirteen days, but while Diodorus has him doing it with pleasure (*hestheis*; 17.77.3), Curtius adds an element of humour by depicting the king as the reluctant partner of an overly passionate woman: 'The woman's enthusiasm for sex was keener than Alexander's and she pressed him to stop there a few days. Thirteen days were devoted to serving her passion, after which Thalestris headed for her kingdom and Alexander for Parthiene' (Curt. 6.5.32, trans. Yardley).²⁷

The way Curtius tells the episode makes it as remote as possible from historians' alleged agenda of glorifying Alexander. Curtius' purpose is revealed in the narrative that immediately follows the Amazon story. Alexander, we are told, lost control over his desires and

discarded the traditional discipline that he had brought from home in favour of imitating Persian royalty. He demanded *proskynesis* from his followers, wore Persian dress and—no less important—filled his court with 365 concubines and gangs of eunuchs who allowed themselves to be used like women (Curt. 6.6.1–8). The other Vulgate historians similarly place the Amazon episode right before their disapproving description of Alexander’s assumption of royal Persian grandeur, suggesting a common source. Yet while Justin (12.3.8–12) connects the visit with Alexander’s lapse into foreign ways with no more than a perfunctory ‘after this’, and Diodorus (17.77.4–7) with no such transition, Curtius creates a linking theme of yielding to desire that starts with Alexander’s falling in love with, and being influenced by, a barbarian eunuch and continues with his spending (though somewhat unwillingly) thirteen days on nothing but satisfying a lustful queen. In short, even if Curtius knew of historians who denied or ignored the visit, he needed it for his account.²⁸

Plutarch

Plutarch’s treatment of the episode in his *Life of Alexander* is the most learned of all our sources (Plu., *Alex.* 46). Although his narrative moves back and forth in time and space, Plutarch places the story, like others, in Hyrcania and close to the theft of Alexander’s horse, Bucephalus, the king’s donning Persian dress and his adopting local practices—without, however, spinning these motifs together into any thematic thread.²⁹ For reasons that can only be conjectured, the biographer focuses his efforts on disproving the episode’s historicity. His other biographies suggest that he did not share Strabo’s doubts about the Amazons’ existence in ancient or more modern times. In his *Life of Theseus* he faults certain details in accounts about the Amazons but does not treat the warrior women as an invention. In the biography of Pompey the Great he similarly accepts, without significant reservations, a report that the Roman general defeated an army that included Amazons, and he even uses the present tense to describe their residing in a remote region.³⁰ Therefore it is possible that Plutarch disapproved of the story because he was convinced by other authors who denied it explicitly or implicitly.

The biographer begins the episode by reporting the queen’s arrival without naming her or describing her purpose. Possibly he assumed that his readers were familiar with the story, but it is equally likely that he was more interested in disproving the story than in telling it. For that purpose he produces exceptionally detailed lists of authors who report the visit and of those who say that it is a ‘fiction’ (πλάσμα

ᾠοσι). Many scholars, including the present author, have mined this passage for its citations of lost histories of Alexander. Less noticed is Plutarch's agenda. Some of the authors he mentions in each category are little more than names to us, and it is a fair assumption that this was also true for a number of Plutarch's readers. Such readers would have been swayed by the reputations and number of the authors who accepted or rejected the tradition. Here the balance is clearly skewed. Plutarch says that many report the story but in fact he names only five, as opposed to the nine who he says deny it.³¹ Whether he made the lists himself or, more probably, borrowed them from another source, he used them to showcase his erudition and to suggest the unlikelihood of the event.³² Plutarch then proceeds to indicate more clearly where he stands by producing evidence that supports only the deniers. The first witness is Alexander himself, speaking through a letter to his regent in Macedonia, Antipater. Plutarch states that the king reported everything, including a royal offer to marry a Scythian princess, but made no mention of the Amazonian queen. We should not expect the biographer to question the authenticity of the letter, but his interpretation of it, based on an *argumentum ex silentio*, suggests that some of the historians on the *contra* list do not deny the story outright but simply fail to mention it.³³ Moreover, Plutarch ignores the significant difference between the Scythian marriage proposal and the queen's request. While the prospective bride was supposed to join Alexander's court, the queen did not aim to unite their fates but to return home pregnant. Plutarch's selective reading of the letter shows, then, that he aimed to rationalise and belittle the story of the queen's visit.³⁴ For his second proof of the visit's fictionality the biographer uses one of the most effective means of undermining credibility, namely, ridicule. He tells how years later, Onesicritus—one of the named authorities for the story—read it aloud to King Lysimachus. The king gently but acidly remarked, 'And where was I then?' For Plutarch and his readers, the devastating punchline must have removed any doubt that he was correct in rejecting the authenticity of the story.

Having accomplished his goal, Plutarch comments on his small scholarly project in a way that is relevant to the theme of truth and fiction in historical works (*Alex.* 46.4). He states that belief or disbelief in the story will have no effect on one's admiration for (or amazement about, θαυμάσειε) Alexander. What does the credibility of the story have to do with Plutarch's or other readers' favourable attitude towards the king? Possibly the Amazon episode flattered the king, as Diodorus says, and Plutarch felt the need to defend his scepticism lest it suggest ill will towards his subject. Yet his authorial

note is meaningful for an additional reason: his professed indifference about trust in the report strongly suggests that Plutarch's opinion of the king matters more to him than his search for the truth of the affair.

Arrian

Arrian refers to Alexander and the Amazons in his narrative but passes over in silence the story of his meeting with their queen. It is highly unlikely that he was ignorant of this famous tale, even if Ptolemy and Aristobulus, whom Arrian considered his best authorities on Alexander, did not report it (Plut. *Alex.* 46.2). Arrian's professed criteria for using material outside these sources are that it be (1) worth telling and (2) not entirely untrustworthy (*Preface* 1–3). Neither standard is precise or impartial, but it would be hard to argue that the visit of the Amazon queen was not worth telling. It appears that Arrian was set against according the story even the privilege of denial.

He mentions the Amazons twice, however. The first reference comes in relation to events in the winter of 329/28 in Bactra. After describing an embassy from the king of the European Scythians, who offered Alexander his daughter in marriage together with his friendship and alliance, Arrian reports that Alexander was also visited by Pharasmanes, king of Chorasmia, a land south of the Aral Sea. Pharasmanes offered Alexander his assistance in case Alexander wished to go against Pharasmanes' neighbours, the Colchians and the Amazons. Alexander recommended Pharasmanes to the satraps who bordered his territory, but told him that he (Alexander) was now preoccupied with a campaign to India. He added that, after returning from there and conquering Asia, he intended to lead an expedition to the Pontus, where Pharasmanes' aid would be expected (Arr. 4.15.1–6).

Strabo would have become suspicious of the story. A large distance separated the Chorasmian territory around the Aral Sea from the Pontine (Black) Sea around which the Amazons were usually located, and where Alexander thought that Pharasmanes' assistance would be required. But Alexander's and his contemporaries' deficient geographical knowledge did not mean that the story of the embassy was invented in order to augment the king's prestige. Indeed, scholars have suggested different solutions of the geographical puzzle, such as the possibility that something about Pharasmanes' mention of the Amazons was lost in translation, that Pharasmanes tried to bait Alexander to fight his wars with Amazonian tales, or that the

Macedonians misidentified Asian warrior women whom they saw or heard about with Amazons.³⁵ What is significant for our purpose, however, is that Arrian uses his chief informants, Aristobulus and/or Ptolemy, for his report on Pharasmanes.³⁶ This is made clear by the passage that immediately precedes the account of the embassies, where Arrian notes that he has reached the end of his digression on the opposition of Cleitus, Callisthenes and Hermolaus to Alexander (Arr. 4.14.3–4). He then returns to the events of Alexander's march, which he narrates with no variant traditions or chronological leaps, and which therefore must be based on Ptolemy and Aristobulus. This means that Arrian's chief sources did not dispute Pharasmanes' account of the Amazons, suspicious as they or Alexander may have been of his intentions. Unlike Ptolemy and Aristobulus, however, Arrian was sceptical of the existence of Amazons in historical times, as he reveals later in his narrative (7.13.5 and below). Perhaps he failed to comment on Pharasmanes' Amazons from inattentiveness or from reluctance to deal with the Amazon issue at this point. It is equally or even more likely, however, that he wished to avoid questioning his most trusted sources and preferred to link his scepticism of the Amazons to accounts that he discredits. This he does in the last book of the *Anabasis*, at the point where Alexander is on his way to Ecbatana in 324 (7.13.2–6).

The context in which Arrian mentions Alexander and the Amazons for the second time is appropriately full of variants of 'it is said'. More often than not, this phrase is Arrian's way of qualifying the information he presents, which comes, in many cases, from his secondary sources.³⁷ Thus his discussion of the Amazons is preceded by 'a story' about a quarrel between two of Alexander's officers and is followed by an 'it is said' about the king seeing the Nesaeian Plain and its famous horses (7.13.1, after a lacuna). Then comes another 'it is said' about the satrap Atropates, who gave Alexander 100 women whom the satrap identified as Amazons. They were armed like cavalry, with battle-axes and small peltast shields. 'Some say', the historian continues, that they had a smaller right breast, which was exposed in battle. (A careful reader might ask how those present knew about the exposed breast if they never saw these women in combat.³⁸) Alexander, Arrian goes on, sent the women away from the army lest they be molested by his troops, and instructed them to tell their queen that he would come over to have children from her. Arrian then notes that the story is nowhere attested by Aristobulus, Ptolemy or any other competent author, and proceeds to state his views about the Amazons' historicity in ancient and more modern times (7.13.1–3).

In such ways Arrian guides his readers to doubt the story of

Atropates and the Amazons, which, if true (as he concedes a little later), must have involved the satrap's training Asian women to look like Amazons (7.13.4–6). It is not surprising that Arrian uses even unreliable accounts to present his hero's conduct as above reproach. The Victorian historian Tarn also praised Alexander's gallant treatment of the women, exclaiming: 'No one living but Alexander could or would have thought of such a thing.'³⁹ There remains for Tarn the problem that Alexander's message to the queen indicates that the king, unlike his historians, regarded these women as authentic Amazons. Therefore Tarn dismissed this part of the story as an unreliable addition. Conversely, it has been claimed that Alexander's announcement to the queen that he would arrive to impregnate her constituted a reference to the more famous story of her visiting him, and that Arrian did not strongly refute this tradition.⁴⁰ Yet Arrian unambiguously opines that the Amazons were already extinct before Alexander's time (7.13.4), and he must therefore have regarded her visit as an invention. Indeed, it appears that he chose to report, albeit as a *logos*, a tradition that is the inverse of Thalestris' visit. In the common story, the assertive queen arrives at Alexander's camp and demands to have a child from him, but in Arrian's version an assertive king tells the queen through her warriors to wait for him in order to bear his child. If Arrian's source suggested that Alexander's message was in response to the women's bringing a request from their queen for such a union, Arrian omits this part. We are back to Strabo's world, in which male and female behave as their gender ordains and where there is no doubt about Alexander's masculinity.⁴¹

Arrian's subsequent treatment of the historicity of the Amazons both resembles and differs from Plutarch's. Like Plutarch, he tells truth from fiction on the basis of the problematical assumption that if something is missing in his trusted sources it means that it never happened. He then extends this denial to the Amazons' survival into historical times. He cites his literary model, Xenophon, who he says showed that there were already no Amazons when Xenophon was around Trapezus (in 400), because Xenophon mentioned in his *Anabasis* other barbarian peoples he encountered but no Amazons. Arrian's evidence is dubious, if only because he assumes that the Amazons lived in just that region, and because he fails to notice that the satrap who produced them to Alexander actually came from far-away Media.⁴² Arrian then distinguishes between the unattested 'modern' Amazons and the well-attested ancient ones. In view of the controversy over the existence of the earlier Amazons, he phrases his position cautiously: 'I do not think credible that this race of women never existed at all' (7.13.5, trans. Brunt). But then he produces proofs

and a long list of supporting witnesses, all in favour of their authenticity. He states that many famous authors celebrated them, and that there is a story about Heracles defeating them and bringing the girdle of their queen to Greece, as well as another tale about Theseus, who repelled them from Athens. The painter Micon, he goes on, commemorated (on the Painted Stoa) both their battle against the Athenians and the battle of Marathon. The last testimony confirms their invasion both visually and historically by lumping it with an undisputed, famous historical victory.⁴³ Arrian then adds the testimonies of Herodotus and of the Athenian funeral speeches in defence of the early Amazons' historicity. Many of his proofs come from Athenian traditions, and Arrian combines poetic or mythical accounts with (supposedly) more accurate historical works, even though there was a well-established distinction between the reliabilities of both genres, at least since Thucydides (Th. 1.20.1–21.1, 22.4). Indeed, Arrian himself is critical elsewhere of tales about Heracles or Dionysus in India, following in the footsteps of earlier authors such as Eratosthenes, who had questioned these stories and attributed them to the Macedonians' wish to exalt Alexander.⁴⁴ Yet (as suggested above concerning Strabo and Plutarch) authors made the distinction between myth and history not as a matter of course, but when it served their historiographical purpose. In the case of the ancient Amazons, Arrian could find no hidden agenda that accounted for the tales about them. Therefore he indiscriminately used legend, history, art and oratory to authenticate them. His goal, however, was not limited to this task, nor did he use Atropates' story as a peg on which to hang a scholarly digression on the Amazons, as has been claimed.⁴⁵ His excursus on the ancient Amazons is sandwiched between two denials of their existence in Alexander's time, and serves as a foil whereby the authenticity of the old Amazons highlights the poor attestation for their existence in later periods. This is why Arrian concludes his survey of the ancient Amazons by questioning Atropates' Amazons, claiming that, if the satrap ever showed Alexander any horsewomen, they must have been other barbarian women decked in Amazonian dress. Arrian does not, however, attribute any motive to the creation of the pretended Amazons, perhaps because it would have complicated his theory about their 'true' identity.⁴⁶ His rationalisation of the story also skips over the inconvenient detail that Alexander appeared to have no suspicions of these 'Amazons', whom he instructed to tell their queen of his wish to beget children by her. Evidently, it was easier to charge historians or even historical characters such as Atropates with fictionalisation than to account for it.

Justin

We conclude with the latest of the main sources for Alexander, Justin, who epitomised Pompeius Trogus' *Philippic History*.⁴⁷ Justin shows not the slightest doubt about the existence of ancient or more modern Amazons. In the second book of his *Epitome* he expands on their origins, their way of life, their wars with Heracles and Theseus, and their campaigns in Asia and Europe (2.4.1–33). He, or his source, seemed to regard the tale of the Amazon queen's visit to Alexander as particularly memorable. In addition to reporting it in its chronological context, Justin refers to it twice elsewhere. The first reference comes at the conclusion of his history of the ancient Amazons, where he says that after the death of the heroine Penthesileia and her army in the Trojan War, the Amazons continued to live, with difficulties, down to the time of Alexander. The qualification implies an awareness of the controversy over their history later than the Trojan War. Justin goes on to report that Queen Minithyia, or Thalestris (*sic*), slept with Alexander for thirteen days in order to have a child. She died, however, shortly after her return home, and with her died every mention of the Amazon name (Just. 2.4.32–3). It should be said to Justin's credit that, intentionally or not, he is the only historian who reports the queen's meeting with the king from an 'Amazonian' perspective. All other versions make the episode part of Alexander's story, but in Justin's book two it concludes his Amazonian history and even assumes a tragic tone in suggesting that the Amazons' last chance of reviving their old fame died with Thalestris. Justin mentions the meeting once again in the excursus on Armenian mythical history that he appends to his account of events in the late second century BC. He notes that the Amazons were the neighbours of the Albani and that numerous authors report that their queen Thalestris wished to sleep with Alexander (42.3.7). The author clearly hoped that his readers would be familiar with the full story, which he had already recounted twice (2.4.32–3; 12.3.5–7). It is still noteworthy that he has no hesitation in mixing the mythical and more recent past, and that he uses the episode to identify the Amazonian nation as a whole.

The fullest account of the meeting in Justin is included in his history of Alexander (12.3.5–7). Like other historians, he locates it in Hyrcania and before Alexander's assumption of Persian royal dress and excess, but unlike Curtius he does not link these events thematically. The details he provides suggest an affinity with the common source of the Vulgate, probably Cleitarchus, as well as additional material and his own contribution.⁴⁸ Thus Justin is the only source (besides Orosius' garbled version) who adds to the queen's

more common name, Thalestris, the variant Minithyia (also in 2.4.32; cf. Oros. 3.18.5: Halestris and Minothea). He mentions her 300 Amazonian companions, but adds that it took her thirty-five days to travel through a densely populated (or hostile, according to a suggested emendation) territory.⁴⁹ He alone among our sources describes the reaction to her visit from the campers' point of view: they were astonished by her unwomanly attire and her request to sleep with the king. The motif of the Amazons' strangeness appears in most other sources, but only Justin refers to the public dimension of her visit. As in Curtius and Diodorus, she gets thirteen days from Alexander in which to accomplish her mission, and Justin adds that she left when it looked as if she was pregnant. He fails to say exactly how she divined her condition, and omits mention of her death at home shortly thereafter, which he narrates elsewhere. Clearly, in this part of his history Justin focuses his attention on the king.

Justin was comfortable with the story for a number of reasons. It answered two of his three professed criteria for excerpting material from Trogus: it was noteworthy and it made enjoyable reading (the third criterion was providing a moral example: *Preface* 4). He probably also found it a good fit with his other depictions of the Amazons and their character as given in book two, while the fact that 'many authors' reported it (42.3.7) gave the story an aura of credibility. Yet what was most striking for Justin was the woman's unabashed determination to sleep with the king. He offers no criticism of her or of Alexander, probably because he believes that both of them fulfilled their duty. Maybe they provided a moral example after all.

In sum, thanks especially to Strabo and Plutarch, the story of Alexander and the queen of the Amazons has become a way of judging the quality of the primary sources on Alexander. Those who report it are deemed untrustworthy while those who ignore or dispute it are credited with a Thucydidean ambition for accuracy and a healthy critical approach. This paper has tried to show that the authors' decision to treat the story as truth or fiction was not based exclusively on their trust in their sources or these sources' original judgement of its veracity. Issues such as gender, the author's belief in the historicity of the Amazons in different periods, and literary considerations could also affect an author's attitude towards the story and his choices in presenting it.

Notes

- 1 For bibliography on the subject, see Baynham (2001, 115 n. 2); Ogden (2011, 234 n. 9). Both studies have been very helpful to the present investigation.

Unless otherwise noted, all dates in this paper are BC.

- 2 Besides the sources discussed here, Orosius (3.18.5) very briefly reports the queen's wish to have a child from Alexander. I do not discuss Alexander's correspondence with the Amazons in the Alexander Romance, which does not mention our episode: see Stoneman (2008, 128–32), noting the absence of erotica in the Romance; Bobas (2008, 16–18).
- 3 Cleitarchus' date: Prandi (1996, 69–71, 79–81; 2012); cf. Bosworth (1997, 212–14). For a lower date, see Parker (2009).
- 4 *POxy* 4808: Beresford et al. (2007, 34). Plu., *Alex.* 46.1 states that Ptolemy denies the story, but it is uncertain, as we shall see, that Ptolemy did so explicitly or that Plutarch deduced it from his silence. See the previous note on the debate over Cleitarchus' date. For Onesicritus as the possible originator of the story of the visit, see Pédech (1984, 87–9); Whitby (2011); cf. Parker (2009, 49, 50 n. 71). Parker suggests that Cleitarchus consulted Onesicritus (who reported the story) and Aristobulus (who didn't). Prandi (1996, 77–9; 2012, 19) offers also Polyclitus (*FGrH* no. 128) as a candidate for authoring the story, and Amitay an unattested poem (2010, 78–86).
- 5 Bosworth (2000, 8); Baynham (2001, 126).
- 6 Cf. Eckhart (2007, 80–81). It was only after completing this paper that I came upon Eckhart's dissertation (2007), which deals in part with the present subject. While I share her approach and methodology, we do not always agree in our conclusions. I shall refrain, however, from contesting dissertations that were not published in a revised form (save for one exception, below).
- 7 D. S. 2.44.1–46.6; 3.52.1–55.11, 71.3–4; 4.16.1–4, 28.1–4; Boulogne (2008, 28–9); Fabre-Serris (2008, esp. 40–46).
- 8 D. S. 3.52.1–55.11. Although Diodorus refers to the mythology of the Libyan Amazons, he is careful to note that their existence is attested by many early poets and not a few historians, and that he follows the mythographer Dionysius Skytobrachion for their history: 3.52.1–3, 55.11.
- 9 D. S. 2.44.1–2, 45.1; 3.52.4, 53.6, 71.3; 4.16.2–3. C. B. Welles' LCL translation of παράδοξον τῆς παρουσίας in 17.77.2 as the 'king marvelled at the (queen's) unexpected arrival' is unattractive. Her presence was a marvel rather than unexpected. See Curtius 6.5.25, where the queen informs Alexander of her arrival in advance. Welles' comment that 'disbelief in Amazons as such is a modern phenomenon' (Oldfather et al. 1933–67, 7: 141 n. 1, followed by Hamilton 1969, 126) is disproved by Diodorus' aforementioned quotations, and, as we shall see, by both Strabo and Arrian.
- 10 D. S. 2.46.4–6; 4.16.4, 28.1–4. Cf. Ogden (1996, 184). See however, Fabre-Serris (2008, 43, 46).
- 11 This is a dominant view in studies of Greek depictions of Amazons (e.g. Bremer 2000), and in relation to our topic, see Dumas (1992) and Fabre-Serris (2008, esp. 43–8), whose view fits better Strabo than Diodorus.
- 12 Cf. also Eckhart (2007, 88–9), who believes that Diodorus' agenda was to promote not patriarchy but Greek heroes and their political systems.
- 13 The view that the Amazons were eliminated long ago was especially strong: Lys. 2.4–6; Aristid. 1.82–4; cf. Isoc. 4.68–70 and Dem. 60.8, who, however, allow them to survive the invasion of Attica, as do Diodorus (above) and Justin (below). See also Bosworth (1988, 65–7); Ogden (1996, 182–6; 2011, 148–9).
- 14 Cf. 12.3.22; 15.1.9, and see Eckhart (2007, 112–13).
- 15 I cannot agree with McCoskey's highly sophisticated analysis of Strabo 11.5.3,

which suggests that Strabo distinguished between tales about the Amazons and the Amazons themselves (2005, 70–72). Eckhart's view is that Strabo never questions the Amazons' existence (2007, 166).

- 16 E.g., Strabo 12.8.6; 13.3.6. For 'Amazonian' monuments, see Dowden (1997, 117–19, 121), who ties them to local cults.
- 17 This is not to say, as claimed by Pearson (1960, 214–15 n. 14), that Strabo distorted Cleitarchus' account; see Atkinson (1994, 2: 197–8).
- 18 Strabo 11.5.5; Prandi (1996, 20–21). Cf. Strabo 11.6.4, 7.4; 15.1, 7, 9, 28; Arr. 5.5.3.
- 19 Curt. 6.5.24–32. The following agrees largely with Dumas (1992), but not with her discussion of how the episode is handled by the different sources or with her view that the queen is portrayed as a sexual menace and a bad influence on the king.
- 20 Cf. Baynham (1998, 170).
- 21 Curt. 6.5.1–6.10; D. S. 17.76.3–77.5; Justin 12.3.4–12, who likely used additional sources (below). For Cleitarchus as their source, see e.g. Hamilton (1969, 124); Prandi (1992, 91–2; 1996 *passim*). For the location of Curtius' Amazons: Atkinson (1994, 2: 186); Heckel in Yardley and Heckel (1997, 1: 201–2).
- 22 For the historicity of Alexander's meeting with Bagoas, see Badian (1958, 144–7). Hammond (1983, 322) is sceptic about the eunuch's influence.
- 23 So also Dumas (1992, 350). See Atkinson (1994, 2: 200) for artistic images of Amazons as possible sources of Curtius' depiction of their dress; cf. Dumas (1992, 347–9).
- 24 Cf. Tarn (1948, 2: 92–3), who, however, misjudges the author's attitude.
- 25 See Baynham (2001, 117 n. 15), for Alexander's height. Dumas (1992, 350, 352–3) misses the comic element, and makes the queen taller, which is nowhere attested.
- 26 Strabo 11.5.1; cf. Just. 2.4.9–10, and see Ogden (2011, 147). Other sources, however, report more brutal treatment of Amazonian male children.
- 27 Erotic Amazons: Blok (1995, 197 n. 3). Ogden (2011, 123, 147) argues that Curtius shows Alexander's self-restraint in the presence of appealing women, but he also rightly notes the weak link of the episode to this theme (2011, 228 n. 53). Indeed, *pace* Dumas (1992, 353), Thalestris in Curtius is more passionate than seductive, and contrast Cleophris: Curt. 10.34–36; Just. 12.7.9–11; cf. Orosius 3.19.1–2.
- 28 For the possibility that Curtius read Ptolemy, who ignored the visit (Plu., *Alex.* 46.1–2), see Baynham (1998, 78). Ogden (2011, 149–50), points to similarities between this episode and the myth of Heracles, who got his stolen horses back from the creature Echidna in return for sleeping with her. As it happened, Alexander had his famous horse, Bucephalus, stolen shortly before the queen's visit, but he preferred to terrorise the natives in order to get it back: Curt. 6.5.17–21; D. S. 17.76.5–8; Plu., *Alex.* 44.3; cf. Arr. 5.19.6.
- 29 See Bosworth (1995, 2: 102), and Whitby (2011), for Plutarch's confusing use of 'here' in *Alex.* 46.1, which should refer to Hyrcania.
- 30 Plu., *Thes.* 27–8; *Dem.* 19; *Pomp.* 35.3–4; *Comp. Thes. et Rom.* 1, 6; cf. App., *Mithr.* 103. Pelling (2002, 176–7, 189) thinks, however, that Plutarch was more hesitant about the later Amazons and suggests that his standards of truth were different for the 'mythical' Amazons. Yet neither in his *Theseus* nor in *Pompey*

does Plutarch express doubts about their existence.

- 31 Cf. his similar technique for confirming that Theseus went to the Amazons' land independently rather than as Heracles' companion: *Thes.* 26.1–2.
- 32 Display of scholarship: cf. Pelling (2002, 367–8). Scholars have postulated different sources for the list. Tarn (1948, 2: 308) and Hamilton (1969, 124–5): a monograph on the Amazons (and possibly Ister of Paphos). Bosworth (1995, 2: 103) and Baynham (2001, 118–19): Eratosthenes with possible supplements. Hammond (1993, 151–2) notes Plutarch's choice of non-traditional sources.
- 33 See Bosworth (1995, 2: 102–3), supplemented by Baynham (2001, 118); cf. Heckel in Yardley and Heckel (1997, 1: 200).
- 34 Cf. Eckhart (2007, 87). Mederer (1936, 87, 92) and Tarn (1948, 2: 327–8) thought that the Scythian offer gave rise to the story of the queen's visit; *contra*: Bosworth (1995, 2: 102); Baynham (2001, 122), who suggest encounters with Asian female warriors as a possible inspiration.
- 35 See, respectively, Brunt (1976, 1: 525); Tarn (1948, 2: 327–8); Green (1991, 359); Baynham (2001, 120); Bosworth (1995, 2: 105–6; 1996, 81–3); Stoneman (2008, 132).
- 36 For the following see also Bosworth (1988, 67; 1995, 2: 101; 1996, 83), who also suggests that Arrian predated these embassies. Cf. Pearson (1960, 164), who, on the basis of earlier scholarship, suggests only Aristobulus as Arrian's source.
- 37 See conveniently Bosworth (1980, 1: 20–21).
- 38 See Baynham (2001, 120, with n. 25) for an explanation of their smaller right breast.
- 39 Tarn (1948, 2: 329).
- 40 Mederer (1936, 90); Bosworth (1995, 2: 102–3).
- 41 For different interpretations, see Dumas (1992, 353); Baynham (2001, 121).
- 42 The Median location was noted by Brunt (1983, 2: 494–5), but he unnecessarily deduced from it that the Atropates episode was a late invention. Arrian knew the tradition that located the Amazons near the River Thermodon: *Periplus* 13.
- 43 Arr. 7.13.4–6. The painting of Marathon is also attributed to Panaenus: Paus. 1.15.3; Aelian, *VH* 7.38.
- 44 4.28.1–2; 5.3.1–4; cf. *Ind.* 5.9–13; Strabo 15.1.7–9; Bosworth (1995, 2: 181, 197–219).
- 45 *Contra* Bosworth (1980, 1: 21 n. 15; 1988, 65–7).
- 46 For speculation on Atropates' motives, see Baynham (2001, 121).
- 47 For Justin's date, which ranges from early third to late fourth century AD, see Yardley in Yardley and Heckel (1997, 10–13). The *Philippic History* is commonly dated to around the beginning of the first century AD: Yardley (1997, 4–6).
- 48 See Hammond (1983, 102); Atkinson (1994, 2: 198); Heckel in Yardley and Heckel (1997, 200–201).
- 49 The emendation: Heckel in Yardley and Heckel (1997, 201–2), who thinks that the figure of thirty-five days comes from Cleitarchus.

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13 Lucian on Truth and Lies in Ancient Historiography

The Theory and its Limits

Melina Tamiolaki

The topic of truth in ancient historiography is certainly complex. Although the historians' claims that they will report or stick to 'the truth' may seem at first hand banal, on closer inspection, it appears that the search for the truth as a historical principle is far from simple or uncontroversial. Many issues arise that deserve exploration. What did ancients (in our case, ancient Greeks) understand by the term 'truth'? Which terms did they use to convey its meaning and with what nuances? To what is 'truth' opposed? Is it opposed to 'lies' or rather to 'fiction'? Finally, to what extent is the search for the truth a distinctive trait of historiography that would differentiate it from other genres, e.g. poetry or oratory?

These themes have already attracted scholarly attention. Relevant studies could be schematically divided into two categories: those which discuss the function of truth and lies in specific authors¹ and those which address the broader issue of the relationship of historiography to rhetoric or fiction, usually with the aim of showing that the generic boundaries are not so strict.² Yet there is still work to be done, in my opinion, in two directions: first, towards a systematic collection and analysis of the terms related to 'truth', 'lies' and 'fiction' in the ancient Greek literature. This inquiry reveals, as the topic of this volume suggests, the presence of multiple and often competing 'truths' and thus poses several questions. For instance, what is the relationship between historical truth and truth in tragedy? Is there an interconnection between historical and philosophical truth? How is fiction perceived by authors of different genres?³ A second productive line of research would be the enrichment of this, let's say, linguistic/textual approach by a theoretical analysis. From the Hellenistic period onwards a theory of historiography began to develop and truth constituted a predominant trait of this theoretical discourse.⁴ It is thus worth exploring how truth was conceptualised and theorised in the field of the writing of history. Lucian's *De Historia Conscribenda* is a

suitable text for the combination of these two perspectives, and for this reason it will be the focus of this paper.

Lucian lived in the second century AD. By that time the genre of historiography had evolved and acquired some standard traits. Lucian is thus not the first author who invents or even sets forth the rules of historiography: other treatises on history are also attested, although their contents have not been preserved;⁵ moreover, in the works of other authors (such as Polybius, Diodorus and Dionysius of Halicarnassus) we find principles of history similar to those defended and promoted by Lucian, a fact that has cost Lucian the accusation of lack of originality.⁶ Nevertheless, Lucian's treatise deserves some special attention, first because of its peculiar form: although it is written in the form of a letter, apparently addressed to Lucian's friend, Philo, this work, as Homeyer and others have shown,⁷ has the traits of a cynical diatribe, combining a satirical and a serious tone.⁸ Secondly, one can hardly overlook the fact that Lucian shows awareness of and builds upon a long and multifaceted tradition of historiography;⁹ it is thus no wonder that his text has also been studied from the perspective of the theory of history.¹⁰ Furthermore, Lucian's treatise should be examined, in my view, on its own merit and in combination with other Lucianic works, as reflecting contemporary trends in historiography and in literature more generally. One could also argue that even the parodic tone gives Lucian a greater freedom to contribute in his own way to the debates of his times. My aim in this paper is to examine how Lucian responds to and incorporates in his treatise a plurality of truths (both inherited by his predecessors and dictated by his own era) and to investigate whether he himself contributes to the definition of truth in historiography.

The treatise is divided into two parts: the *pars destruens* (§6–32), in which Lucian exposes the drawbacks of bad historians and explains what a good historian should avoid, and the *pars construens* (§33–63), which is centred on the qualities with which an ideal historian should be equipped.¹¹ Truth and lies occupy a conspicuous place in both parts of the treatise.¹² The dichotomy between truth and lies seems to be very marked in Lucian, and indeed more marked than in the Classical historians. Herodotus and Thucydides, for instance, did often criticise their predecessors (be it poets or prose writers) for factual errors or lack of painstaking inquiry in the search for truth, but they did not do so exclusively in terms of 'truth' and 'lies'.¹³ Although Lucian is acquainted with the work of Classical historians and most often considers them as models, he seems to defend a different, more absolute, concept of the truth. In his treatise he aims at establishing (at least at first sight) a clear demarcation between truth and lies in

historiography.

In what follows, I shall examine closely the references to truth (ἀλήθεια) and lies (ψεῦδος) in Lucian's treatise. This investigation shows that, although 'truth' is a *desideratum* for historians of all times, it is subject to tensions, limits and contradictions. These contradictions are linked with the genre of historiography in antiquity and seem to have been inherited in Lucian's time and reflected in his works. Moreover, some of Lucian's preconceptions about truth and lies in history should be placed within the cultural context of the Second Sophistic. Lucian is inevitably influenced by various conceptions of the truth (especially philosophical truth) that circulated during the second century AD. For this reason, it will be illuminating to give some examples of the place of the truth in other Lucianic works as well.

Πσεῦδος (Lies)

Seen from a modern perspective, accusing a historian of lying is indeed a hard accusation. However, the issue of lying is not alien to ancient historiography. In an interesting study, T. Wiseman has detected seven types of mendacity of the ancient historians. These include panegyric, myth, travellers' tales, tragic historiography, rhetorical narration, lack of *akribeia* and lack of sufficient elaboration.¹⁴ Factual errors mostly arouse the charge of mendacity, as well as descriptions of wonders and exotic lands, which belong to the genre of paradoxography. Lucian exploits this tradition in his work *Verae Historiae*, an allegoric journey that subtly parodies the topic of truth and fiction in literature. In the preface of this work, Lucian puts in the same category poets, philosophers and historians, presenting them all as liars. Lucian's satirical depiction thus effaces the differences between the various truths represented by different genres and professions:

every detail in my story alludes comically to one or another of the poets, historians and philosophers of old, who have written much that smacks of miracles and fables (τεράστια καὶ μυθώδη) . . . One of them is *Ctesias, son of Ctesiochus, of Cnidos*, who wrote a great deal about India and its characteristics that he had never seen himself nor heard from anyone else with a reputation of truthfulness. Iambulus also wrote much that was strange about the countries in the great sea . . . Many others, with the same intent, have written about imaginary travels and journeys of theirs, telling of huge beasts, cruel men and strange ways of living. Their guide and instructor in this sort of charlatanry is Homer's Odysseus, who tells Alcinous and his court about winds in bondage, one-eyed men, cannibals and savages . . . Well, on reading all these authors, *I did not find much fault with them for their lying, as I saw that this was already a*

common practice even among men who profess philosophy (τοῦ ψεύσασθαι μὲν οὐ σφόδρα τοὺς ἄνδρας ἐμεμψάμην, ὁρῶν ἤδη σύννηθες ὃν τοῦτο καὶ τοῖς φιλοσοφεῖν ὑπισχνουμένοις).

Lucian, *VH* 115

In the *De Historia Conscribenda*, on the contrary, Lucian does not explore this issue in detail. He uses the verb ψεύδομαι only twice in order to describe a factual error, related to numbers:

Well, this man I mentioned described incredible wounds and monstrous deaths (καὶ τραύματα συνέγραψεν πάνυ ἀπίθανα καὶ θανάτους ἀλλοκότους), how one man was wounded in the big toe and died on the spot, and how Priscus the general just gave a shout and twenty-seven of the enemy fell dead. And in the number slain he even contradicted the officers' despatches with his lies (ἐψεύσατο): at Europus, he said, the enemy lost 70.236 killed, while the Romans lost just two and had nine wounded. I do not think anyone in his senses would accept that.

Lucian, *Hist. Conscr.* 20

Yet we can put up with all these things as far as they are faults of expression and arrangement of material. But to lie with regards to localities, not just by parasangs but by whole days' marches (τὸ δὲ καὶ παρὰ τοὺς τόπους αὐτοὺς ψεύδεσθαι οὐ παρασάγγας μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ σταθμοὺς ὅλους), what fineness of style does that resemble?

Lucian, *Hist. Conscr.* 24

Lucian does not elaborate on how he conceives of lying. Although he seems to distinguish ἀμάρτημα (error) from ψεῦδος (lie) he does not explain, as some historians do, whether these lies are deliberate or not. More importantly, elsewhere in his treatise he may allude to factual errors, but without classifying them as 'lies'. He rather attributes them to ignorance:

Again, concerning the death of Severianus, this same man wrote that all the others had been deceived in supposing he perished by the sword—he died by fasting because he thought this the most painless way of dying. He did not know (οὐκ εἰδώς) that the whole business took, say, three days while those who keep away from food generally last a week.

Lucian, *Hist. Conscr.* 21

These elements suggest that Lucian's focus is different in this work. In fact, in the *De Historia Conscribenda* Lucian insists on panegyric and flattery as a form of lie. This is probably due to the fact that his treatise was written after the victory of the Romans against the Parthians,¹⁶ an event that had caused, as Lucian himself comically

narrates at the beginning of his treatise, a feverish trend¹⁷ towards the writing of history; obviously then the topic of panegyric in historiography during that period must have been much more acute.

We can now examine more closely Lucian's treatment of ψευδος. In this part of my paper I shall argue that Lucian's rigidity concerning the condemnation of ψευδος in history vanishes over the course of the treatise: Lucian eventually approves of certain elements (such as praise and beauty) that he had initially associated with lying.

Lucian deals with ψευδος in history in §§ 7–10 of his treatise. He employs a rigid comparison in order to show the complete incompatibility of history with ψευδος: 'history cannot admit a lie, even a tiny one, any more than a windpipe, as sons of doctors say, can tolerate anything entering it in swallowing' (*Hist. Conscr.* 7). This comparison appears as the climax of a reflection against the presence of panegyric (ἐγκώμιον, ἔπαινος) in historiography. The argument is then expanded into the distinction between prose and poetry and another element is added, flattery (κολακεία). In a concluding observation, Lucian summarises the anti-historical elements of poetry, adding yet another element, myth:

μέγα τοίνυν—μᾶλλον δὲ ὑπέρμεγα τοῦτο κακόν—εἰ μὴ εἰδείη τις χωρίζειν τὰ ἱστορίας καὶ τὰ ποιητικῆς, ἀλλ' ἐπεισάγοι τῇ ἱστορίᾳ τὰ τῆς ἑτέρας κομώματα—τὸν μῦθον καὶ τὸ ἐγκώμιον καὶ τὰς ἐν τούτοις ὑπερβολάς.

So it is a great deal—all too great a fault—not to know how to keep the attributes of history and poetry separate, and to bring poetry's embellishments into history—myth and eulogy and the exaggeration of both.

Lucian, *Hist. Conscr.* 8

Finally, the same elements that constitute ψευδος appear again immediately afterwards, when Lucian defends the necessity for historians to stick to the useful rather than to the pleasant: 'but if you neglect these elements and sweeten your history beyond reason with myths and eulogies and similar treatments' (ἦν δὲ ἀμελήσας ἐκείνων ἡδύνης πέρα τοῦ μετρίου τὴν ἱστορίαν μύθοις καὶ ἐπαίνοις καὶ τῇ ἄλλῃ θωπεία, *Hist. Conscr.* 10).

This treatment allows for several observations. It is obvious that Lucian builds upon previous tradition. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle offered a theoretical discussion of the differences between poetry and history:

For the distinction between the historian and the poet is not whether they give their accounts in verse or prose . . . the [real] difference is this: that the one [i.e. the historian] tells what happened, the other [i.e. the poet] [tells] the sort

of things that can happen. That's why in fact poetry is a more speculative and more 'serious' business than history: for poetry deals more with universals, history with particulars.¹⁸

Aristotle defends the superiority of poetry to prose, but not in terms of truth and lies. By contrast, Lucian's denigration of poetic traits relies on a conviction to the superiority of truth and consequently implies the superiority of history. In his rejection of poetic traits Lucian follows the historians who have contested myth: the condemnation of myth (μυθῶδες) and the defence of the useful against the pleasant definitely evoke Thucydides, as well as Polybius.¹⁹ Similarly, in dealing with panegyric in historiography, Lucian follows and adapts the concerns of the Hellenistic historians.²⁰

Yet Lucian's elaboration has some distinctive characteristics that render his work something more than a simple imitation or reproduction of his predecessors' views. Lucian seems to blur the distinction between μῦθος (myth), ἔπαινος (eulogy) and κολακεία (flattery). He treats all these elements as aspects of ψεῦδος (subsequently, poetry is viewed as the exclusive realm of ψεῦδος).²¹ This presentation differentiates him not only from the Classical historians, who did not raise at all the issue of flattery, but also from other authors, such as Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who mainly oppose fiction (and not flattery) to history.²²

The emphasis on ψεῦδος enhances the moral dimension of Lucian's treatise, but the fusion of terminology eventually undermines the success of Lucian's paradigms. For example, Lucian claims that Homer introduces hyperbolic praises in his poems:

If they want to praise Agamemnon (ἀλλὰ κἄν Ἀγαμέμνονα ἐπαινέσαι θέλωσιν) there is no one to prevent his having a head and eyes like Zeus, a chest like Zeus' brother Poseidon, and a belt like Ares, and in general the son of Atreus and Aerope must be a compound of all the gods for not Zeus nor Poseidon nor Ares alone is adequate to give the fullness of his beauty. *But if history introduces flattery* of this sort (ἡ ἱστορία δὲ ἦν τινα κολακείαν τοιαύτην προσλάβῃ), what else does it become but a sort of prose-poetry . . .?

Lucian, *Hist. Conscr.* 8

The term κολακεία (flattery) is more suitable, however, when we speak about contemporaries. Of course, we have here an example of comic distortion, but this image creates a contradiction with another idea found in the treatise, according to which what is written about the distant past deserves more credibility than what is written about contemporary events, precisely because people tend to flatter their contemporaries. From this perspective, Homer would not seem to

flatter his heroes too much, since a great historical distance separates him from them:

Homer indeed in general tended towards the mythical in his account of Achilles, yet some nowadays are inclined to believe him; they cite as important evidence of his truthfulness the single fact that he did not write about him during his lifetime: *they cannot find any motive for lying* (οὐ γὰρ εὕρισκουσιν οὔτινος ἔνεκα ἐψεύδεται ἄν).

Lucian, *Hist. Conscr.* 40²³

Furthermore, Lucian oscillates between rejecting and accepting the inclusion of praise in history. He initially makes us believe that historians who include panegyric or flatteries in their works act in this way, *out of ignorance* of the differences between poetry and history (see the expressions ἀγνοεῖν εἰκόασιν, εἰ μὴ εἰδείῃ, *Hist. Conscr.* 8), implying a rigid distinction between history and poetry. Yet, immediately afterwards, he makes a concession as to the presence of praise in history: he states that praise *may be justified* in history, provided that it is not exaggerated and placed in the appropriate place:

I do not say that there is no room for occasional praise in history. But it must be given at the proper time and kept within reasonable limits (καὶ οὐ τοῦτό φημι, ὥς οὐχὶ καὶ ἐπαινετέον ἐν ἱστορίᾳ ἐνίστε. ἀλλ' ἐν καιρῷ τῷ προσήκοντι ἐπαινετέον καὶ μέτρον ἐπακτέον τῷ πράγματι) to avoid displeasing future readers. In general such matters should be controlled with a view to what posterity demands.

Lucian, *Hist. Conscr.* 9

Although the clarifications concerning the appropriate occasion or the proper measure are rather vague (a projection to a future audience), it is important that Lucian finally seems to admit that the boundaries between poetry and history may not be so strict.²⁴

Finally, Lucian's comparisons deserve closer examination. Lucian twice establishes a comparison between poetry and an effeminate man:

So it is a great deal—all to a great fault—not to know how to keep the attributes of history and poetry separate, and to bring poetry's embellishments into history—myth and eulogy and the exaggeration of both: it is as if you were to dress one of our tough, rugged athletes in a purple dress and the rest of the paraphernalia of a pretty light-o'-love and daub and paint his face. Heavens! How ridiculous you would make him look, shaming him with all that decoration (Ἡράκλεις ὥς καταγέλαστον αὐτὸν ἀπεργάσαιτ' αἰσχύνας τῷ κόσμῳ ἐκείνῳ).

But if you . . . sweeten your history beyond reason with myths and eulogies and the other kinds of ornaments, you will make it like Heracles in Lydia. You have probably seen pictures of him as slave to Omphale, dressed in a most outlandish way: Omphale is wearing his lion's skin and carrying his club in her hand, as if she were Heracles for certain, while he has a saffron and purple gown and is carding wool and getting rapped with Omphale's sandal. It is an ugly spectacle: the clothing hangs off his body is ill-fitting, and his divine masculinity is disgracefully feminised (καὶ τὸ θέαμα αἰσχιστον, ἀφεστῶσα ἢ ἐσθῆς τοῦ σώματος καὶ μὴ προσιζάνουσα καὶ τοῦ θεοῦ τὸ ἀνδρῶδες ἀσχημόνως καταθηλυνόμενον).

Lucian, *Hist. Conscr.* 10

These comparisons, which have inspired Wiseman's book title, *Clio's Cosmetics*,²⁵ are intriguing. They suggest that the ornaments of poetry, when used in history, make the latter resemble a man who is disguised like a woman. Scholars have commented on the issue of gender distortion. Lucian seems to convey the impression that these ornaments are external and can be added or taken away with ease. This means, as M. Fox has rightly observed, that history is viewed as a transcendental object, a hard core.²⁶ I would push this point a bit further: the emphasis on θέαμα suggests that history is primarily viewed as an aesthetic phenomenon.²⁷ Lucian's comparisons stress how history *appears*, when it includes praise and flatteries, not what it *becomes*. And it is remarkable, from this perspective, that Lucian does not describe a state of loss of masculinity. These ornaments do not make History lose its essence; only its external appearance seems to be affected. It becomes incongruous, in a sense. This presentation could mitigate the negative judgement about the inclusion of praise or myths in history: if praise and myth resemble ornaments, then the success of history writing may also depend not on the negation but rather on the proper use of these elements.²⁸

Ἀλήθεια (Truth)

Truth also figures prominently in Lucian's treatise. It is noteworthy that it is conceived negatively: (1) as linked with the useful and opposed to the pleasant, (2) as the opposite of flattery, (3) as the opposite of rhetorical practice. Let us examine more closely these references.

The first reference to the truth occurs in the treatment about the differences between poetry and prose:

Now some think they can make a satisfactory distinction in history between what gives pleasure (τερπνόν) and what is useful (χρήσιμον), and for this reason work eulogy into it as giving pleasure and enjoyment to its readers; *but do you see how far they are from the truth* (τᾶληθοῦς ἡμαρτήκασι)? In the first place, the distinction they draw is false: history has one task and one end—what is useful (χρήσιμον)—, *and that comes from truth* (ἐκ τοῦ ἀληθοῦς) *alone*. As for what gives pleasure, it is certainly better if it is there incidentally—like beauty in an athlete; but if it isn't there, there is nothing to prevent Nicostratus, the son of Isidotus, a true blue and a stouter fellow than either of his rivals, from becoming 'a successor of Heracles', although he is ugly to look at (αἰσχιστος ὀφθῆναι εἶη τὴν ὄψιν), while his opponent is Alcaeus of Miletus, the handsome fellow who, they say, was loved by Nicostratus. So it is with history—if she were to make the mistake of dealing in pleasure (τερπνόν) as well, she would attract a host of lovers, but as long as she keeps only what is hers alone—the publication of the truth (τῆς ἀληθείας δήλωσιν)—she will give little thought to beauty (τοῦ κάλλους).

Lucian *Hist. Conscr.* 9

Lucian elaborates here on Thucydides' methodological chapter and on the distinction between an ephemeral competition piece (ἀγωνίσμα ἐς το παραχρῆμα ἀκούειν) and possession for all time (κτῆμα ἐς αἰεῖ). His emphasis on usefulness (χρήσιμον) further evokes Polybius.²⁹ Yet Lucian adapts the Thucydidean principle for his own purposes: first, he links pleasure (τερπνόν) with praise, and secondly, he makes a concession as to the presence of pleasure in history. This concession parallels the concession about the presence of praise in history that we noticed above. Just as in his treatment of praise, we can observe here again a kind of anti-climax: Lucian at first hand seems very rigid (ἐν γὰρ ἔργον ἱστορίας καὶ τέλος), then he makes a concession and finally he concludes that the history that sticks to the truth should show only a small (but not zero) concern with beauty. A bit later, he states again that history can indeed be combined with pleasure, but does not specify in which way: 'If anyone supposes that giving pleasure has to be mixed into historical writing, there are *other refinements of style* that combine pleasure with truth' (εἰ δέ τις πάντως τὸ τερπνὸν ἡγεῖται καταμεῖχθαι δεῖν τῇ ἱστορίᾳ πάσῃ, ἄλλα ἂ σὺν ἀληθείᾳ τερπνά ἐστὶν ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις κάλλεσι τοῦ λόγου, *Hist. Conscr.* 13).

It is interesting that Lucian's terminology shifts from the pleasant (τερπνόν) to the beautiful (κάλλος). The argument begins with an emphasis on praise as an expression of the pleasant (τερπνόν), but ends up in a general reflection about beauty in history. The impression conveyed is thus that the perspective is broadened and that the discussion can include all kinds of ornaments (linguistic, of content) that lead to beauty (κάλλος).³⁰

Lucian's comparison again deserves closer examination. Lucian compares history without ornaments with an ugly athlete, who, nevertheless, wins the course. He aims to illustrate that external beauty does not count so much. It is interesting, however, that he uses the expression αἷσχιςτος ὀφθῆναι (ugly to look at) for this ugly athlete, as this parallels θέαμα αἷσχιςτον (ugliest spectacle), which he had used in the analogy we saw before: between the effeminate Heracles and history loaded with myths and praise. This comparison again undermines Lucian's apparent rigidity in denouncing pleasure, since it suggests that history without ornaments is *as ugly as* history overloaded with ornaments.

Truth is then defined as absence of flattery:³¹

The historian's sole task is to tell the story as it happened. This he cannot do as long as he is afraid of Artaxerxes when he is physician or hopes to get a purple cufta, a gold necklet, and a Nisaeon horse as a reward for the eulogies in his work. No Xenophon (a just historian), no Thucydides will do that. On the contrary, even if he personally hates certain people he will think the public interest far more binding, and regard truth as worth more than enmity (τὴν ἀλήθειαν περὶ πλείονος ποιήσεται τῆς ἐχθρας), and if he has a friend, he will nevertheless not spare him if he errs; . . . whoever serves the present will rightly be counted a flatterer—a person on whom history long ago right from the beginning has turned its back (εἰ δὲ τὸ παραυτίκα τις θεραπεύοι, τῆς τῶν κολακευόντων μερίδος εἰκότως ἂν νομισθεῖ, οὓς πάλαι ἡ ἱστορία καὶ ἐξ ἀρχῆς εὐθὺς ἀπέστραπτο).

Lucian, *Hist. Conscr.* 39–40

In order to strengthen this thesis, Lucian again has recourse to the Thucydidean methodological chapter:

κτῆμά τε γάρ φησι μᾶλλον ἐς αἰὲ συγγράφειν ἢ περ ἐς τὸ παρὸν ἀγώνισμα, καὶ μὴ τὸ μυθῶδες ἀσπάζεσθαι ἀλλὰ τὴν ἀλήθειαν τῶν γεγεννημένων ἀπολείπειν τοῖς ὕστερον.

For Thucydides says that he is writing a possession for ever—he does not accept myths, but is leaving to posterity the true account of what happened.

Lucian, *Hist. Conscr.* 42

Thucydides' statement runs as follows:

καὶ ἐς μὲν ἀκρόασιν ἴσως τὸ μὴ μυθῶδες αὐτῶν ἀτερπέστερον φανεῖται· ὅσοι δὲ βουλῆσονται τῶν τε γενομένων τὸ σαφὲς σκοπεῖν καὶ τῶν μελλόντων ποτὲ αὖθις κατὰ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον τοιοῦτων καὶ παραπλησίων ἔσεσθαι, ὠφέλιμα κρίνειν αὐτὰ ἀρκούντως ἔξει. κτῆμά τε ἐς αἰεὶ μᾶλλον ἢ ἀγώνισμα ἐς τὸ παραχρῆμα ἀκούειν ξύγκειται.

And the results, by avoiding mythic elements, will perhaps seem less enjoyable

for listening. Yet if they are judged useful by any who wish to look at the accuracy of the events, both past and those which at some future time, in accordance with human nature, will recur in similar or comparable ways, that will suffice. It is a possession for all time, not a competition piece to be heard for the moment, that has been composed.³²

Lucian adapts the Thucydidean statement with regards to the following points: Thucydides, interestingly, as A. Woodman has emphasised, does not talk about truth (ἀλήθεια) in this chapter, but about τὸ σαφές (clarity, accuracy).³³ This may mean that Thucydides recognised that accuracy rather than truth was a more feasible goal for historians. Moreover, he does not raise the issue of flattery. Finally, he does not appear very confident about the utility of his history. He seems to make a concession on this topic: he refers to ‘those who will want to understand, learn etc.’ (οἷσι δὲ βουλήσονται), implying that there will probably be others who may not be able to profit from his history. This could be considered a comment on human weakness or the limitations of human intelligence. It is obvious then that Lucian anachronistically projects on Thucydides historical concerns that do not belong to the fifth century BC, but started developing later, during the Hellenistic period.

Lucian’s emphasis on the ideal historian’s care about the future rather than the present raises further issues: what does ‘not care about the present’ exactly mean: not writing about contemporary events, but rather about events of the distant past, as it is implied in chapter 40, that we saw above? Writing about contemporary events but with an eye on the future? And how can this practically be achieved? In any case, using Thucydides, the champion of contemporary history, in order to suggest that the historian should not care about the present is at least ambiguous. It is also ironic that Lucian admits that it is a contemporary event that triggered the proliferation of historical writings and subsequently the writing of his own treatise. These tensions testify again to the difficulty of drawing a clear line of demarcation between writing for the present and writing for the future in history.³⁴

Finally, Lucian addresses the question of truth as opposed to rhetorical practice:

Above all, let him bring a mind like a mirror, clear, gleaming-bright, accurately centered (μάλιστα δὲ κατόπτρῳ εἰκυῖαν παρασχέσθω τὴν γνώμην), displaying the shape of things just as he receives them, free from distortion, false colouring, and misrepresentation. His concern is different from that of the orators—what historians have to relate is fact and will speak for itself, for it has already happened: what is required is arrangement and exposition. So they must look not for what to say, but how to say it. (οὐ γὰρ ὥσπερ οἱ ῥήτορες

γράφουσιν, ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν λεχθισόμενα ἔστιν καὶ εἰρήσεται: πέπρακται γὰρ ἡδη· δεῖ δὲ τάξαι καὶ εἰπεῖν αὐτά. ὥστε οὐ τί εἴπωσι ζητητέον αὐτοῖς ἀλλ' ὅπως εἴπωσιν.) In brief, we must consider that the writer of history should be like Phidias or Praxiteles or Alcamenes or one of the other sculptors—they certainly never manufactured their own gold or silver or ivory or their other material; no, their material was before them, put into their hands by Eleans or Athenians or Argives, and they confined themselves to fashioning it, sawing the ivory, polishing, glueing, aligning it, setting it off with the gold, and their art lay in handling their material properly. The task of the historian is similar: to give a fine arrangement of events and illuminate them as vividly as possible

Lucian, *Hist. Conscr.* 50

Lucian does not use the word ἀλήθεια in this chapter, but it is obvious that he speaks about factual truth, the description of the events. Here he denies absolutely the rhetorical device of *inventio*: historians do not need to make up stories from their mind; their task is to describe the facts that have already taken place. This chapter has already attracted scholarly attention.³⁵ As noted above, Lucian conceives of history as a transcendental object, as a fixed hard core. And this could render him a first champion of 'objective' history, as M. Fox observes. But it is astonishing that Lucian completely downplays the issue of content: ὥστε οὐ τί εἴπωσι ζητητέον αὐτοῖς ἀλλ' ὅπως εἴπωσιν.³⁶ This means that he privileges form rather than content, not because form is more important, but because, more alarmingly, content is not an issue for him: facts are there. He thus discards in one phrase the main issue that haunts modern historiography, the selection and classification of the material as a first step towards a trustworthy historical account. Indeed, it is not by chance that, when he deals with this topic, he does not explicitly link it with the search for the truth: 'As to the facts themselves, he (i.e. the historian) should not assemble them at random, but only after much laborious and painstaking investigation' (*Hist. Conscr.* 47). Lucian's view has important drawbacks if seen from a modern perspective. As H. White notes, 'no given set of casually recorded historical events can in itself constitute a story; the most it might offer to the historian are story elements. The events are made into a story . . . historical structures and processes are not like the original; we cannot go and look at them in order to see if the historian has adequately reproduced them in his narrative'.³⁷ But it would be anachronistic to expect from Lucian to express modern reflections on the writing of history. For our purposes, it is important to show the limits of this theory in its own context.

The conception of truth Lucian espouses is subject to ambiguities that become apparent if we examine the arguments more closely. First of all, the comparison of the thought of the historian with a mirror is

tricky. Lucian states that the mind of the historian should work like a mirror, accurately reflecting the events he reports. However, given that mirrored reflection can be partial or even delusive,³⁸ it does not necessarily follow that the historian's account is always an undistorted version of the events.³⁹ Secondly, concerning the comparison of the historian with the sculptor, it has already been observed by M. Fox that this analogy is faulty: 'the argument should run: the sculptor sticks as closely as possible to the model that is before him . . . only two stages are envisaged . . . the raw material and the polished final product. We would expect three: the model, the raw material and the technical rendition one into the other'.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, the analogy, as it stands, has a further connotation: the fact that there are different sculptors with the same or different material necessarily points to different elaborations of the material. This implication applies to the historian as well. And the question thus arises: are all historical elaborations equally 'true'? And what is the criterion to judge them? Lucian's treatment touches upon this crucial question, but leaves it unanswered. More radically, the assimilation of a historian to an artist further challenges the previous demarcation between history and poetry: an artist is primarily interested in beauty, whereas the historian is supposed to care little about beauty. Finally, it is noteworthy, in my opinion, that Lucian mentions the orators here occasionally and in passing: 'his concern is different from that of the orators—what historians have to relate is fact and will speak for itself' (*Hist. Conscr.* 50). He could have mentioned them when he spoke about praise and flatteries as well. More interestingly, the reference to them is not derogatory: on the contrary, they appear to have a double task, *inventio* and *dispositio*, whereas the historian does not need *inventio*. Lucian's reluctance to dwell on the differences between the historian and the orator is telling. Lucian strives to distinguish history from rhetoric (in the same way he also tries to distinguish historians from poets, and bad from good historians), but is not very successful in it; the ideal historian ends up in being a kind of half-orator.⁴¹

It appears then that Lucian's arguments proceed by tensions: between denying and accepting praise, between denying and accepting beauty in the writing of history, and finally, between denying and accepting the demarcation of history from poetry and from rhetoric. These tensions are inherent in the genre of historiography: Classical historians indeed tried to distinguish themselves from poets, but could not distance themselves altogether from their techniques, since they constantly viewed themselves in competition with them.⁴² Lucian's treatise inherits these tensions and at the same reflects the trends of his own time towards theory and

standardisation. The prominent place of rhetoric in the context of the Second Sophistic also played an important role. Lucian thus seems at pains to reconcile two traditions: an older one, which connected history with the search for accuracy (τὸ σαφές, according to Thucydides, or ἀτρεκέϊη, according to Herodotus), and a new and contemporary one, which assigned a predominant role to rhetoric. That's why his treatise attests (perhaps rather timidly) to the convergences between the historian and the orator.

Finally, it would not be far-fetched to maintain that Lucian has something to contribute to the issue of plurality of truths. Lucian links truth with παρρησία (the free expression of speech) in his description of the ideal historian:

τοιούτος οὖν μοι ὁ συγγραφεὺς ἔστω—ἄφοβος, ἀδέκαστος, ἐλεύθερος, παρρησίας καὶ ἀληθείας φίλος, ὥς ὁ κωμικός φησι, τὰ σῦκα σῦκα, τὴν σκάφην δὲ σκάφην ὀνομάσων.

That, then, is the sort of man the historian should be: fearless, incorruptible, free, a friend of free expression and the truth, intent, as the comic poet says, on calling a fig a fig and trough a trough.

Lucian, *Hist. Conscr.* 41

The combination of παρρησία and ἀλήθεια is attested in other Lucianic works, which are not associated with historiography. Παρρησία in Lucian is an important component of ἀλήθεια, which is placed in a rhetorical context.⁴³ As Robert Porod has recently shown, it is also linked with cynical values.⁴⁴ Moreover, in the Lucianic corpus, truth is abundantly attested as a concept that encompasses everything: poetry, rhetoric, philosophy, art. It is even personified.⁴⁵ The generalised emphasis on truth could account for Lucian's concern to underline its rigid character in his treatise about how to write history: perhaps Lucian attempts to project a philosophical dimension of the query for the truth to historiography. In this way, he introduces an additional 'truth' (a Lucianic one), which goes hand in hand with the pre-existing 'truths' of the Classical historians.

In conclusion, our investigation has demonstrated the various problems raised by the search for the truth in historiography. These problems mainly derive from the difficulties involved in defining and even defending the truth as a historical principle: although Lucian initially rejects panegyric as a poetic element that is opposed to truth, he eventually approves of it under specific conditions; although he privileges usefulness over pleasure as the goal of history and as a presupposition of truth, he does not completely banish beauty from

the writing of history. Lucian's conception of truth is linked with the distinctive character of the genre of historiography, as well as with the concerns of his own time. In fact, Lucian's treatise incorporates (and attempts to reconcile) two different concepts of truth: a more fluid one, mainly represented by the Classical historians, who did not view themselves as conveyors of an absolute truth and did not treat factual errors as lies,⁴⁶ and a rather more 'rigid' notion of the truth, philosophically—and rhetorically—oriented, which constituted a *desideratum* of Lucian's time. In this way, Lucian's treatise represents an amalgam of various 'truths' and ultimately serves to acute our sense of the problems posed by the writing of history.⁴⁷

Notes

- 1 See for instance the essays collected in Gill and Wiseman (1993).
- 2 To this second category belong studies that have provided much food for thought for all students of history and historiography, such as White (1987) and Woodman (1988).
- 3 For these issues, see the Introduction of this volume.
- 4 See in detail Zangara (2007).
- 5 E.g. there is a lost work by Theophrastus, *Περὶ ἱστορίας*. See Avenarius (1956, 11); cf. Homeyer (1965, 46).
- 6 This is suggested mainly by older studies, such as that of Avenarius (1956), who collects all the passages from authors who may have influenced Lucian. Bompaire (1958, 483), although he acknowledges the art of Lucian, characterises the *De Historia Conscribenda* as a 'pastiche amusante de Thucydide'.
- 7 Homeyer (1965, 16–29); cf. Porod (2009).
- 8 For the tension between form and content, as reflecting a tension between the 'satirical' and the 'serious', see Homeyer (1965, 29).
- 9 For Lucian's relationship to Classical historians, see now Porod (2013, 209–24).
- 10 Fox (2001) has offered a penetrating analysis of many of Lucian's paradigms and examines them in the light of modern theories of history. See also Wiseman (1979), Gabba (1981), Wheeldon (1989), Zangara (2007), Free (2015).
- 11 This distinction is introduced by Avenarius (1956) and followed by Montanari (1987).
- 12 It has to be noted here parenthetically, however, that Lucian does not exploit the threefold distinction, between truth, lies and fiction. Following the Greek tradition, he speaks only about truth and lies, probably because the term fiction (πλάττειν), as Hose (1996) has shown, is a later insertion in the Greek culture and translates the Latin word *figere*. That said, ancient Greeks were aware of the concept of fictionality. See Ruffell (this volume).
- 13 See, for instance, the parallel expressions used by Herodotus (2.45.1: λέγουσι δὲ πολλὰ καὶ ἄλλα ἀνεπισκέπτως οἱ Ἕλληνες) and Thucydides (1.20.3: οὕτως ἀταλαίπωρος τοῖς πολλοῖς ἡ ζήτησις ταῆς ἀληθείας), which do not necessarily imply that the inclusion of myths or other versions are 'lies'; rather, they might be 'false versions'. In general, the concept of the truth in Herodotus

and Thucydides is rather fluid. Both historians tend to emphasise more accuracy (ἀτρεκείη in Herodotus, τὸ σαφές in Thucydides) rather than truth. See further Moles (1993); cf. Darbo-Peschanski (this volume).

- 14 Wiseman (1993).
- 15 For an analysis of this proem, see Georgiadou and Larmour (1998, ad loc.), von Moellendorf (2000, ad loc.). Cf. also Gabba (1981). In this preface, however, Herodotus is not named. He appears in *VH* 2.31, together with Ctesias, both of them having been condemned for their lying (καὶ μεγίστας ἀπασῶν τιμωρίας ὑπέμενον οἱ ψευδάμενοι τι παρὰ τὸν βίον καὶ οἱ μὴ τὰ ἀληθῆ συγγεγραφότες, ἐν οἷς καὶ Κτησίαις ὁ Κνίδιος ἦν καὶ Ἡρόδοτος καὶ ἄλλοι πολλοί). See Wesselmann, this volume. For the reasons for this late appearance, see my suggestions in Tamiolaki (2013). Unless otherwise noted, translations used in this paper are from the Loeb edition, sometimes with modifications. All italics denoting emphasis are mine.
- 16 This work is dated after 166 AD. See Homeyer (1965, 11–12). For the importance of the Roman victory over the Parthians and its influence to historiography, see Baldwin (1973, chapter ‘Clio Dethroned’).
- 17 For an excellent analysis of the image of the feverish trend for the writing of history, see von Moellendorf (2001).
- 18 Arist., *Po.* 1451b1–5 (trans. Whalley 1997).
- 19 Th. 1.21.1, 1.22.4; Plb. 3.4.8, 3.31.12–13. For the concept of history in Polybius, see Sacks (1981) and Wiater (this volume). For the reception of Thucydides and Polybius in the *De Historia Conscribenda*, see Free (2015, 33–40).
- 20 Homeyer (1965, 182–3).
- 21 Woodman (1988, 68, nn. 257–8), also notes that Lucian blurs the boundaries between praise and flattery. Cf. also Porod (2013, 315). In fact, eulogy may describe both a genre and a motivation, while flattery does not constitute a separate genre. Myth, however, is a distinct element, which can be exploited for the purpose of both praise and flattery.
- 22 See, for instance, D. H., *Th.* 6: ἔπειτα κατὰ τὸ μηδὲν αὐτῇ μυθῶδες προσάψαι, μηδ’ εἰς ἀπάτην καὶ γοητείαν τῶν πολλῶν ἐκτρέψαι τὴν γραφήν, ὥς οἱ πρὸ αὐτοῦ πάντες ἐποίησαν. For other parallels, see Avenarius (1956, 13–22). It is also interesting that Lucian does not particularly dwell on the issue of blame (ψόγος) as another possible example of lie. There is only one hint to blame (*Hist. Conscr.* 8: πέρα τοῦ μετρίου καταρρίπτοντες).
- 23 I discuss more in detail the concept of historical distance as a prerequisite for objective history in Tamiolaki (2016).
- 24 Trédé (2010) and Billault (2010) see a contemporary taint in Lucian’s defence of occasional praise: his implicit wish to praise the Romans for their victory over the Parthians. This may be true, but in this paper I wish to emphasise that these tensions are also inherent in the genre of historiography.
- 25 Wiseman (1979, 5).
- 26 Fox (2001, 84–9).
- 27 This is an idea present also in Polybius. See Wiater (this volume).
- 28 See also Wiseman (1979, 147).
- 29 Plb. 3.4.8.
- 30 For the combination of aesthetic and moral values in the *De Historia Conscribenda*, see Montanari (1984).

- 31 See for this historical principle, Luce (1989).
- 32 Thuc. 1.22.4 (trans. Lattimore 1998, with modifications).
- 33 See Woodman (1998, 23–8). Free (2015, 37–40) sees an identification of τὸ σαφές with truth, but the difference in terminology is, in my opinion, telling.
- 34 For the concept of posterity in Lucian's *De Historia Conscribenda* in Tamiolaki (2016).
- 35 Zangara (2007, 10–13).
- 36 It would be tempting to compare the process described by Lucian for historians with the process followed by tragic poets described by Aristotle: according to Aristotle (*Po.* 1453b23–7), tragic poets should not be interested in the what, but rather in the how and why of tragic myths. See Ruffell (this volume), for some qualifications concerning Aristotle's view.
- 37 White (1978, 88). Cf. Wheeldon (1989, 50) and Zangara (2007, 39): 'Dans la perspective rhétorique de la dissociation entre le contenu et la forme, l'idée d'un récit qui, en "informant" les faits, les "performe", est totalement inconcevable.' ('In the rhetorical perspective of the dissociation between content and form, the idea of a narrative, which, by "providing information" on the facts, "performs" them, is totally inconceivable.')
- 38 See, for instance, Darrigol (2012, 1–15), for an illuminating overview of ancient perceptions of optics.
- 39 For a variation of the mirror comparison, see Polybius (1.4.4, 6–11), who, however, compares the narrative of the events with a mirror of the actual facts. See Wiater (this volume).
- 40 Fox (2001, 84).
- 41 Mattioli (1985, 97): 'Sul modello del retore viene così costruita l'immagine dello storico; si potrebbe dire che lo storico è un retore di tipo particolare che non ha problemi di *inventio*' ('The image of the historian is constructed upon the model of the orator; we could say that the historian is an orator of a particular type who does not have the problems of *inventio*'); von Moellendorf (2001, 137–8), with further bibliography; Zangara (2007, 56); Tamiolaki (2015).
- 42 Woodman (1988), Marincola (1997).
- 43 See for instance the following occurrences, in which ἀλήθεια is mentioned jointly with παρησία: *Char.* 13, *De Merc. cond.* 4.15, *Alex.* 47.
- 44 Porod (2009).
- 45 For the encompassing character of truth in Lucian, see indicatively *Phal.* 1.12 (truth and art), *Demon.* 4.1 (truth and philosophy), *Gall.* 18 (sophists and truth), *Pisc.* 16 (truth and education), *Rhet. Praec.* 8 (truth and poetry).
- 46 See above, n. 13.
- 47 I thank Lisa Hau and Ian Ruffell for the organisation of the wonderful panel 'Pluralising the Past' (part of the Celtic Conference in Classics 2012), in the framework of which this paper was originally presented, as well as for their valuable comments on earlier drafts of this paper. I am also grateful to the anonymous referees for further useful suggestions. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the financial support of my research by the Foundation of Education and European Culture (Athens, Greece).

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Index

- abstraction 63–5
- accuracy 109, 155, 181–4, 206–8, 215, 227–8, 240, 242–4, 260, 262, 275–8
- Achilles 14–18, 22–4, 40, 71, 145, 156, 272
- Aeacidae 15–26
- Aegina 14–27
- Aeschyl(us) 37, 102 n. 33, 149 n. 21; *Agamemnon* 45, 64–5, 115, 157; *Choephoroi* 72; *Eumenides* 45; *Oresteia* 46; *Persians* 48, 114, 124 n. 53; *Prometheus Bound* 45–6; *Seven Against Thebes* 43, 101 n. 18
- aetiology 41, 44–5
- Agathocles 203, 209–17
- Agathon 36, 39, 62
- Ajax 15–20, 24, 26, 40
- aletheia* 84–92, 100, 144, 273–9
- Alexander the Great 156, 161, 242, 244, 250–65
- Amasis 84–6, 98–9, 111–15, 119, 137–8
- Aphaia, Temple of 15, 18–19
- Apollo 45, 84, 87, 94, 119–20, 142, 234
- Arcadians 160–3, 167
- Argos 23, 45, 91, 133–4, 143, 182, 276
- Aristobulus 258–9
- Aristophanes 40, 42–3, 55; *Acharnians* 35–6, 76 n. 14; *Birds* 73; *Frogs* 37; *Peace* 37–8; *Thesmophoriazousai* 36–7
- Aristotle 185–6; *Poetics* 32, 35, 38–9, 42, 47, 105, 109–10, 116–17, 121, 146, 175, 188, 207–8, 211, 215–16, 271; *Politics* 3
- Arrian 156, 250, 253, 258–61
- Asia 135, 143, 250, 253, 258, 259, 261
- Astyages 82, 86–7, 89–90, 95
- Athens 2, 14, 15, 20, 26, 27, 42–3, 45, 48, 117, 157–8, 160–1, 252, 260
- Atropates 259–61
- audience 15–21, 25–6, 32–7, 40–9, 55, 63, 69–70, 71, 74, 92, 110, 131, 134, 137, 146, 166, 173, 205, 272
- authenticity 48, 71, 205, 250, 252, 257, 260–1
- authority 2–3, 13–15, 21, 27, 39, 41, 55, 69, 108, 111, 121, 134, 155, 166, 202, 242
- autopsy 83, 90, 104, 107, 111, 117, 173, 183

Bacchylides 13, 119

belief 1–3, 6, 8, 26–7, 34, 37, 41, 44, 47–9, 55–7, 67–8, 71, 112, 144–5, 187–8, 241, 251–2, 254, 257, 261–2

bias 4, 8, 226, 231–2

blame 227–8, 231, 235, 241

body 57–9, 61, 95, 98–9, 115, 202–5, 208, 215–16

Callisthenes 227, 237, 258,

Cambyses 82, 85–6, 88–9, 95, 137–8, 141

categories 47, 56, 180, 267

causation 5, 7, 42, 116, 203, 205–9, 212–16

certainty 6, 49, 64, 66–7, 159, 186

chance 60, 64, 84, 112, 161–2, 166, 214–15

chorus 22, 35–6, 45, 63–4, 68–9, 73, 87–8, 91–2, 96, 158

Cicero 3, 104, 146, 173, 174, 184

clarity 60, 62–3, 68, 117, 177, 276

Cleitarchus 250–1, 254–5, 262

coherence 8, 25, 41, 57, 60, 67, 215–16

coincidence 86, 93, 116, 186, 214

comedy 32, 35–8, 42, 71

consistency 41–2, 67

contingency 5–6, 22, 25

contradiction 55–6, 142, 268, 272

convention 40, 71, 177

Corinth 81–3, 89, 92, 94, 117, 166

counterfactuals 5–7, 33, 73–4, 155

credibility 67, 71, 139, 202, 253, 257–8, 262, 272

credulity 4, 41, 67, 188–9

Creon 82, 88, 91, 94, 98

Croesus 13, 82, 86, 95, 100, 110–13, 115–21, 140–2

Ctesias 8, 130, 269; and genre 173–81; and historiographic polemics 181–5; his place in ancient historiography 185–9

cult 15, 23, 44, 48, 49, 132

custom 61, 95, 115, 138, 253

Cyrus the Great 82, 86, 89, 95, 112–13, 115, 117–19, 137–8, 140–2, 178–9

Delphi 45, 81, 95, 117, 119, 142; *see also* oracles

didacticism 8, 25, 28, 55, 110–11, 188, 216, 229–36, 240, 242, 244–5

digressions 111, 117, 145, 178–9, 184, 232, 258, 260

Diodorus Siculus 179, 182, 184, 186, 188, 189, 226, 233–45, 250–2, 255–6, 258, 262, 268

Dionysius of Halicarnassus 174–8, 180, 268, 271

Dionysus 41, 242, 254, 260

Dioscuri 22–3, 62, 75, 106–8
doubt 34, 40, 48, 62, 67–8, 132, 188, 239, 253–4, 256, 259, 261
dreams 85, 88, 95–6, 119–21

Egypt 37, 44, 55, 74–5, 81, 84–6, 95, 105–11, 113, 115, 121, 137–8, 141, 157, 179, 184, 186, 209–12, 241

emotion 36, 69–70, 87–8, 99, 119, 138, 178, 203, 205–12, 214, 216–17, 231–2, 241, 244–5

entertainment 131, 134–6, 215

Epaminondas 160–7

Ephorus 181, 237, 243

episodes 93–6, 116, 203, 208, 215–16

Eratosthenes 254, 260

error 43, 87, 92–5, 115, 182, 240, 251, 269–70, 279

ethnography 108, 114–15, 136, 186

eunuchs 187, 255–6

Euripides: *Aeolus* 38; *Andromeda* 33; *Bacchae* 41; *Bellerophon* 38; *Electra* 45, 158; *Helen* 33, 36–7, 43–4, 55–78, 157; *Hippolytus* 37, 114; *Iphigeneia among the Taurians* 33, 43; *Medea* 43; *Orestes* 45; *Palamedes* 36, 73

evidence 18, 40, 84, 107–8, 117, 121, 132–3, 183, 187, 237, 257, 272

expectations 3, 23, 49, 84, 87, 159, 164, 166, 173, 177

eyewitnesses 38, 90–1, 173, 183, 186, 187, 228, 244

facts 1, 5, 25–7, 69, 131, 172, 181, 185–6, 205, 216, 227–8, 235, 239, 240, 244, 254, 277

falsehood 7, 33–4, 36–7, 40, 63, 68

fear 87–8, 111, 255

fiction 1–3, 5–7, 14–17, 32–5, 39, 71, 73, 104, 115–16, 136, 139, 141, 144–7, 172, 177, 179–81, 234, 244, 250–5, 257, 259–63, 265, 267, 269, 271; and myth 35–41; mythical and fictional particulars 41–6; mythical and fictional reference 46–9

flattery 254, 270–3, 275–6

fortune 60, 85, 98, 100, 105, 110, 112–13, 115–16, 212, 214, 216–17, 229–30, 243–4; *see also* misfortune; reversal

gender 58, 250, 260, 273; *see also* women

genre 2–3, 8, 13, 27, 33, 71, 93, 105, 136, 144, 157, 172–81, 226, 233–5, 260, 267–9, 278–9

Getae 112, 132, 135

gnomai 26–7, 66–7, 134

Gorgias 36, 58, 62, 73, 146

Hellanicus 45, 177, 182–3, 185

Heracles 18, 23, 27, 106–7, 135, 239–40, 242, 260, 273, 275
 Herodotus 8, 15; apparent impartiality 132–4, 159; as storyteller 226; complexity of 118–21, 139–144, 147–8; criticism of 104, 130; criticism of popular views 2, 49; criticism of predecessors 268; Ctesias' relationship to 172–89; general truths in 4, 115–18; intertextual use of 155–7, 159–65; mimetic narrative style 110–15; on accuracy 278; on Amazons 260; on inquiry 81–2, 84, 88–9, 91–3, 95–9; openness of 242; rehabilitation of 5; untruths in 134–9
 Hesiod 38–40, 45–6, 49, 108, 181, 185
historia (*historie*) 81, 83, 96, 102, 105, 109–10, 116–17, 120–1, 123, 180, 204, 211
 Homer 34, 38–40, 43–4, 55, 70, 72, 75, 104, 108–9, 115, 119, 121, 132, 147, 155–8, 161–3, 175, 177, 185, 271–2; *Iliad* 15, 25, 34, 39, 105, 114, 145–6, 157, 161; *Odyssey* 34, 43, 45, 82–3, 143–5, 269
 Hyrcania 250–2, 255–6, 261, 264
 identity 18–19, 21, 23–5, 43, 59, 62–3, 66, 69, 96, 188, 261
 ignorance 185, 240, 270, 272
 illusion 36–7, 57–8, 71, 78, 118, 172
 India 185–6, 254, 258, 260, 269
 innovation 43–4, 46, 70, 72, 83, 108, 116
 intertextuality 8, 42, 61, 72–3, 75, 155–60, 166–7
 invention 7, 33, 39–40, 43, 45, 109
 irony 55, 60, 69, 75
 Jocasta 47, 81, 83, 88, 94
 jokes 36, 37, 136, 123 n. 17
 Josephus 181–2
 justice 16–17, 88, 131, 139, 234, 235
 Justin 178, 250–1, 255–6, 261–2
 juxtaposition 22, 25, 32, 59, 72, 111
 knowledge 2–3, 6–7, 37–8, 42, 49, 55, 61, 69, 71, 83, 86, 93–5, 97, 102, 105–7, 109–10, 112, 118, 181, 207, 215, 229–30, 233, 237, 241, 244, 258
 Laius 81, 83, 89, 91–2, 94–6
 Lampon 17–18, 21–4, 27
 leadership 15, 161, 164–7, 211, 214, 233
 Leonidas 157, 161, 163, 165
 lessons 24–5, 94, 110, 115, 121, 136, 165, 212, 214, 217, 229–30, 243; *see also* didacticism
 Libya 91, 136, 252

Lucian 8, 130, 147–8, 155–6, 180, 185; on lies 269–73; on truth 273–9

Lydia 82, 111, 116–17, 119–20, 141–2, 273

lying 86, 92, 130, 144, 146–9, 181, 185, 211, 228, 240, 246, 267–73

lyric 3, 8, 13, 116

Mantineia 159–60, 162–3, 165–6, 205, 231

Marathon 161, 168, 260

Mardonius 114–15, 157–8

maxims 63, 66–7

memory 1–2, 7–8, 13–15, 17, 20–1, 23–7, 49, 96, 146, 155, 233–4, 238–9, 243–4

Menelaus 36, 44, 59–61, 65–70, 72–5, 109, 145–6

metafiction 32, 172

metaphor 142, 161, 202–3, 210

mimesis 32, 35–6, 39

misfortune 38, 61, 68, 82–3, 86–7, 98–9, 110, 134, 162

morality 40, 59–60, 82, 159

myth 1–3, 81–4, 135, 144–6, 155, 184–5, 189, 234, 236–8, 245, 250, 252–4, 261–2, 269–73, 275; and epinician poetry 13–24, 27; and tragedy 32–49, 55, 57, 69–75

names 23, 39, 41–3, 58–9, 69, 85, 106–8, 113, 242, 251–3, 257, 261–2

narration 27, 116–17, 164, 172, 206, 216, 235–7, 269

narrators 7, 27, 39, 73, 85, 96, 104–10, 112–13, 115–21, 131, 133–4, 147

novel 3, 33, 172, 177–80

objectivity 4–6, 131, 133, 157, 227, 228, 231, 277

oikoumene 143, 203–4

omniscience 67, 69, 104, 117–19, 121

opsis (sight) 90–1, 96

oracles 15, 82, 84, 86, 87, 91, 94–8, 113, 132, 133, 142, 163, 179

panegyric 269–72, 279

paradox 59, 61–3, 65, 67, 69, 75, 183, 213

Paris 44, 55, 59, 64, 65–6, 69, 72, 73, 109, 143, 145, 146

Peleus 15–19

Peloponnesian War 155–6, 159, 161, 166

Pelops 14, 40, 74

Persian Wars 3, 114, 116, 120–1, 134, 155–6, 159–63, 165–6, 182

persona 104–5, 109–15, 117, 119, 121

philosophy 3, 6, 98, 116, 180, 234, 269, 279

Phoenicia 105–6, 130, 139, 143–4, 159
 Photius 174–5, 178–80, 184; Achilles 187
phthonos (envy) 111–14, 16
 Phylarchus 178, 202–3, 205–8, 210, 213, 216–17, 231–2, 243
 piety 38, 140, 142, 234, 243
 Pindar: his vision of the past 27–8; *Isthmians* 14, 18–27; *Nemeans* 16–19, 40; *Olympians* 14, 15, 25, 40
 pity 46, 83, 205, 207, 210, 244, 248, 255
 Plato 32, 35, 38, 40, 93, 100, 157; *Ion* 38; *Phaedo* 39; *Republic* 38
 plausibility 38, 42, 49, 67–8, 130, 138, 185
 pleasure 49, 146, 174, 204–5, 207, 217, 256, 274–5, 279
 plot 5, 16, 33, 37, 46, 57, 64, 68, 70, 72–4, 82–3, 89, 132–3, 145–7, 156, 172, 175, 208, 213, 215–16
 Plutarch 179, 182, 250, 256–8, 260, 262; *On the Malice of Herodotus* 110, 146
 poetry 2–3, 15, 39–40, 42, 49, 56, 60, 73, 109–10, 114–15, 119, 144–7, 157, 173–7, 188, 235, 267, 270–4, 278–9; epinician 3, 13–14, 18, 21–7, 158; *see also* Bacchylides; lyric; Pindar
poikilia (variety) 131, 134, 137, 142, 145
 polemic 6–8, 105, 117, 146, 155, 172, 181–5, 187, 189, 208, 231, 251
polis 7, 18–21, 23–4, 28, 41, 46, 252
 Polybius 4, 177, 182–3, 202–3, 226–33, 235, 238, 240–1, 243–5, 268, 271, 274; description of death of Agathocles 209–12; lack of causation 212–17; on the past as a body 203–5; on ‘tragic’ historiography 205–9
 Polycrates 82, 84–5, 98–9, 112–13, 118
 Poseidon 40, 108, 271–2
 possibility 7, 14, 27, 32, 37, 47–8, 74
 posterity 4, 241, 272, 275
 postmodernism 5–6, 208, 226, 235
 praise 106, 227–9, 231, 233, 235, 237–8, 240–1, 270–5, 278; *see also* epinician; poetry
 Priam 22–3, 27, 109, 145–6
 probability 48, 82, 110, 166, 175, 208
 proof 65, 86, 89, 107, 109, 236, 257, 260
 propaganda 14, 20, 49
 prosperity 84, 100, 112–13, 116; *see also* fortune
 Ps-Demetrius, *On Style* 173–8
 Ptolemy 250–1, 258–9
 Punic War, First 230; Second (Hannibalic) 206, 213–14
 rationalising 3, 40–1, 108, 137, 143, 213, 241, 245, 257, 261
 realism 36, 71, 114–15

reality 6, 34, 55, 57–8, 67, 69, 71, 74, 75, 81–97, 100, 121, 156, 157–9, 167
 reasoning 95, 106–7, 109, 117, 138, 140–1, 205–6
 reliability 41, 55, 68, 104, 130, 138, 183, 187, 203, 205, 260
 repetition 37, 57–61, 72, 82–3, 112, 121, 144, 175
 research 25, 27, 40, 81, 107–9, 119
 reversal (*peripeteia*) 105, 112–13, 115, 178–9, 212, 214, 216, 217
 rhetoric 1, 3–4, 8, 22, 132, 161, 166, 185, 187, 189, 226, 260, 267, 269, 273, 276–9
 ritual 15, 44, 65, 72, 132
 Rome 2, 156, 203, 206, 209, 229–32, 269–70

 Salamis 13–15, 20–7, 97, 111, 139
 scepticism 38, 40, 67, 136, 144, 254, 258–9
 sculptors 276–7
 Scythia 105, 135–6, 140, 257–8
 sensationalism 203, 205, 210, 226, 228; *see also* tragic history
 shock 211–12, 217, 231
 Simonides 3, 13, 114
 Solon 82, 86, 100, 142; *see also* warners
 sophists 58, 62, 157
 Sophocles 72; *Antigone* 43; *Electra* 114; *Oedipus Tyrannus* 48, 81–4, 87–95, 97–8
 Sparta 35, 45, 69, 74, 91, 112, 114–15, 117, 133, 157–8, 160–2, 165–6, 167
 spectators 41, 43, 67, 206, 209–12
 speech acts 33–4, 49
 speeches: funeral (*epitaphios*) 2, 3, 24, 260; in comedy 35–6; in historiography 7, 110–16, 119, 121, 205, 232, 234–6, 241, 243; in tragedy 67, 69
 Stesichorus 45; *Palinode* 40, 51 n. 36, 109
 Strabo 184–6, 250, 252–5, 256, 258, 260, 262
 structure 23, 45, 57–60, 66–7, 104, 110–11, 113, 115, 121, 143–4, 216

 Tantalus 14, 40
 Teiresias 41, 87, 93–4
 Telamon 15–20, 24
 Teucer 58, 63, 71, 73, 74–5
 Thal(l)estris 251, 254–6, 259, 261–2
 Thebes 14, 23, 27, 158, 160, 244
 Theopompus 146, 174, 184–5, 228–9, 237
 Theseus 44, 48, 260, 261
 Thucydides 4, 175, 176, 182, 211–12, 268; as intertext 155–9, as model 108, 206, 271, 274–6, 278; 161, 163, 165–6; on myth 3,

40–1, 146, 260; on speeches 115–16; on truth 226, 230, 238; *see also tyrannicides*

Timaeus 181–3, 227–8, 240–1

tragic elements in history 185; character 114, 178, 179; dialogue 176, 178; narrative 119; structure 146, 168 n. 9, 178, 221 n. 51; style 125 n. 55, n. 57; tone 261

tragic history 202–3, 205–9, 212–13, 216–17, 269

Troy 15, 18, 21–7, 34, 40–2, 44–5, 55, 64, 69, 71–4, 109, 115, 136, 143, 145–6, 155, 157–8, 252, 261

trustworthiness 13, 63, 69, 109, 228, 254, 258, 262, 277

tyrannicides 2, 9 n. 4, 49, 158

unity 22, 60, 156, 207, 215

universal history 202, 204, 206, 213, 216, 217, 233, 235, 237

universals 33–4, 83, 175, 188, 271

unreliability 106, 137, 172, 179–86, 189, 213, 259

untruth 104, 130, 135, 138–9, 147, 182–3, 232

utility 231, 245, 276

vagueness 62–5, 118

verifiability 7–8, 71, 95–6, 130, 244

verisimilitude 47–8, 50 n. 12, 205, 207

violence 17, 157, 209–12, 217, 243–4

visuality 202–17

vividness (*enargeia*) 7, 167, 173, 175–7, 241–3, 277; *see also* *visuality*

Vulgate historians 250, 256, 262

warners 110–16

women 36, 37, 50, 69, 72, 130, 136, 143, 156, 178, 187, 210, 243–4, 251, 253–4, 257–61

wordplay 57–9

Xenophon 18, 174–5, 177, 226, 260, 275; *Cyropaedia* 178–9, 192; *Hellenica* 155, 158–67, 168 n. 20

Xerxes 82, 95–6, 110–11, 114–15, 119–21, 133, 139–40, 160–1, 178

Zeus 25–6, 38, 40, 46, 60–1, 68–9, 71, 74, 114, 124, 135, 145, 271–2